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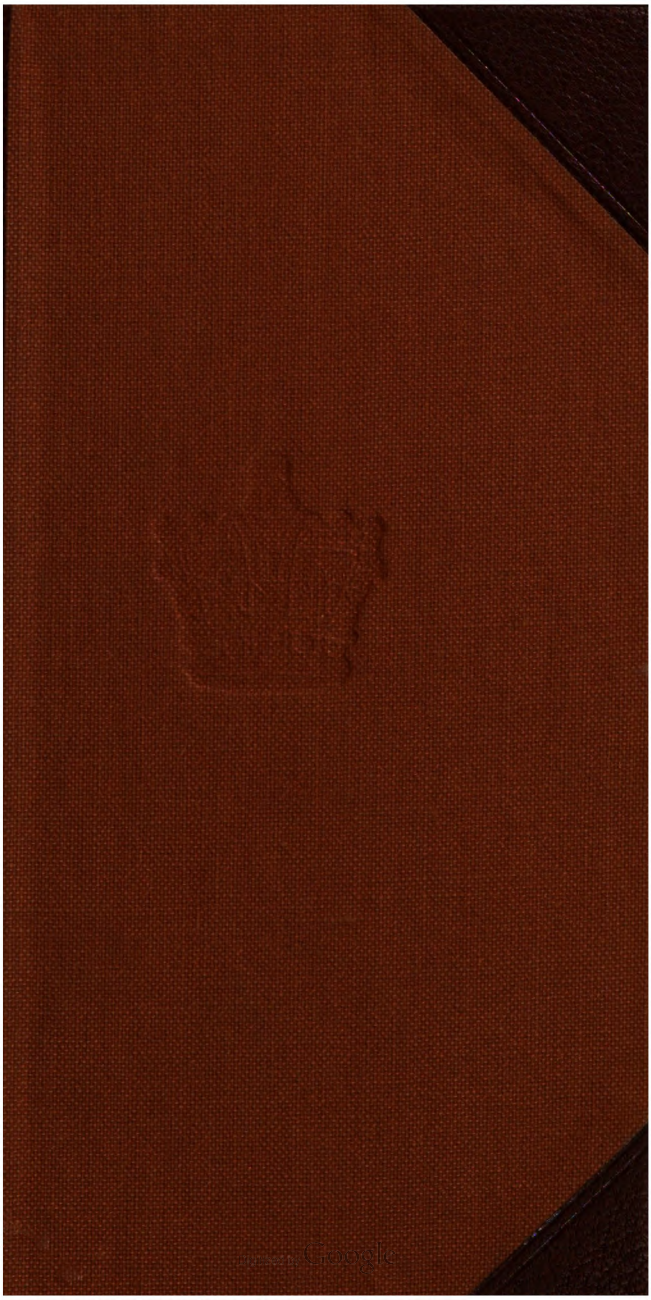

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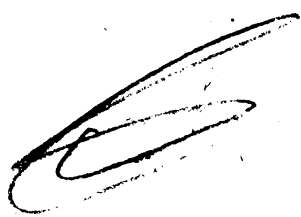

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THE

SCHOOL OF CHRIST.

TRANSLATED FROM AN

ORIGINAL FRENCH MANUSCRIPT

OF

L'ABBÉ GROU,

AUTHOR OF THE CHARACTERS OF REAL DEVOTION AND MORALITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE,

BY THE

LATE REV. A. CLINTON,

TRANSLATOR OF THE TWO ABOVE-MENTIONED WORKS.

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PREFACE.

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PREFACE.

IN quality of Chriſtians, we all glory in being diſciples of Chriſt: but are we really his diſciples? do we conſider him as our Maſter? do we ſtudy his doctrine? do we endeavour to practiſe it? If this were the caſe, there would be more virtuous chriſtians than there are, and we ſhould be leſs apt to flatter ourſelves that we were of the number. The major part do not even confine their care for ſalvation, to the obſervance of the goſpel precepts: others join to this obſervance external practices of piety, vocal prayers, ſpiritual reading, aſſiſting at divine ſervice, and going to the ſacraments. Some alſo, according to their ſtate and condition, extend their attention to works of

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of mercy. If, however, they proceed no further, they are at beſt but imperfect chriſtians: this they will hardly believe, though there is nothing more true. Should they aſk what more is wanting, I anſwer, that the mind muſt be inſtructed in the perfection which Chriſt teaches, and the heart muſt be impreſſed with his ſentiments; that the tendency of the whole conduct of a chriſtian muſt be to deſtroy the old man, the man of ſin, and to ſubſtitute the new man, the man of grace. He who is in theſe diſpoſitions, or ſeriouſly endeavours to acquire them, is entitled to glory in being a diſciple of Chriſt.

From hence we may conclude, that, comparatively ſpeaking, very few know what is neceſſary to be known in order to be a chriſtian; that very few take proper pains to obtain due information, not even imagining that they ſtand in need of it: that a ſtill ſmaller number reduce to practice what they are acquainted with on that head; and that almoſt all are deficient either in knowledge or in good will.

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will. Nevertheleſs thoſe whom I here have in view, readily agree that eternal ſalvation is their grand and only concern, and that a faithful obſervance of the morality of the goſpel alone can ſecure it. Why then are they ſo careleſs in acquiring a juſt knowledge of it, and ſo remiſs in practiſing it?

The drift of this work is at once to inſtruct and to animate them; to this end they are invited to the ſchool of Chriſt. Let them liſten to the leſſons of this heavenly Maſter; let them try to underſtand them, to make a juſt application of them, and to have them deeply engraved both on their mind and heart. This ſhould be the conſtant object of their prayers and reflections, and the ſcope of the whole tenor of their life. At this ſchool, there is always much to be learnt; in proportion as we advance, we diſcover ſomething new; and the obligation of going on, increaſes with the lights we receive; for God does not beſtow them without deſign; he exacts from us the effect of the intention with which he communicates

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cates them; and a barren ſpeculation could but render us more guilty. It is doubtleſs a great evil to abſent from the ſchool of Chriſt; but it is a much greater to frequent it, and not profit by it. Let us liſten, in the firſt place, to his preſſing invitations to come to him, and to the reaſons which ſhould induce us to liſten to him.

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THE PUBLISHER TO THE READER.

TO such as are acquainted with the Author of this Work, now resident in England, his name is a sufficient voucher for its excellency and utility. And those who have attentively read his *Morality of St. Augustine*, and his *Characters of Real Devotion*, published in England and in Ireland, must be convinced of its value; as it is not inferior in spirit and in style to them two much-esteemed Works, and others, which the same Author has written and published in France. Nevertheless, the Translator, though he had been accurate in his translation of the above two works, not content with his own private opinion, committed the present Work to the examination of some Divines of this city, who having read it, highly approved it, and urged its publication. It may not be improper to insert here the testimony of one of them, commissioned by the Most Rev. Doctor Troy, to examine it.

MY L——D,

I have perused with attention and great satisfaction, the Manuscript styled the SCHOOL OF CHRIST, *which your G——e did me the honour to send me, and which I now return. I could discover nothing in it contrary to the Orthodox Faith,*

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Faith, or ſound morality. The Work, in my humble opinion, appears to be a valuable production, ſuitable to the preſent degenerate age; and well calculated to confound the pride of modern Philoſophers; to revive the piety of the primitive Chriſtians; to eſtabliſh virtue on a ſolid baſis; and to combat vice in its poiſonous ſource. For theſe reaſons I ſincerely wiſh, that the ſalutary documents and heavenly leſſons, with which it is replete, may be ſpeedily communicated to the public. With theſe ſentiments, and with the moſt profound reſpect,

I remain, &c.

The Tranſlator, from his reſiding in the country and his habitual infirmities, could not attend to the publication of this excellent Work; he therefore recommended it to a friend to ſee it publiſhed: but he having ſoon after departed this life, and his friend, from various cauſes, being for ſome months prevented from complying with the Tranſlator's deſire, cauſed a regretted delay of the publication. But he now at length offers it for the benefit of the public; with firm hope, that it will advance the virtuous in the obſervance of God's law, and in the ways to Chriſtian Perfection; and reclaim ſome others, who have ſtrayed from them, to wander in the now lamentably much-widened road of eternal perdition; and thus promote the glory of his Divine Majeſty.

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THE

SCHOOL OF CHRIST.

INVITATION OF CHRIST TO COME TO HIS SCHOOL.

*COME to me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refreſh you**. Theſe are thy words, O my Saviour, and to whom do'ſt thou direct them? To all thoſe who are happy enough to acknowledge thee for their Lord and their God. Thou wouldſt alſo direct them unexceptionably to all mankind, if they did but know thee; for ſuffering, ſince the fall of our firſt parents, is become the lot of man. As ſoon as we attain to reflection, we experience our condemnation to ſorrow, we become burdenſome to ourſelves, and our utmoſt endeavours cannot alleviate the weight. In vain do we ſeek for relief from the objects that ſurround us; in thee alone, O my God, is that relief to be found.

* Matth. xi. 28.

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Such is the condition of man, and of every man; that man is miſtaken who thinks himſelf happy: he cannot ſeriouſly reflect on himſelf without being convinced to the contrary. A detail of his evils would be vain, becauſe it is endleſs: every age, rank, and condition, have their ſufferings, every day brings on freſh ſorrows, and excluſive of thoſe which come from external ranks, our own imagination, our natural character, our paſſions and heart are inexhauſtible ſources of them.

How much are thoſe to be pitied, O my Saviour, who from want of the knowledge of thee, cannot recur to thee for relief in their afflictions! They ſuffer without mitigation, comfort, or reward; and all their efforts to extricate themſelves from pain, become additional burdens. Vain and haughty philoſophy, deceitful human reaſon, thou never haſt cured any one of our maladies, nor healed any one of our wounds! We are induſtrious in forming our own torment, but are deſtitute of the means of acquiring peace.

But how much more are thoſe to be pitied who know thee, and yet reject thy gracious invitation! Alas, this is my caſe: I groan and languiſh in ſorrow, I am heavily laden, and inſtead of ſeeking for eaſe from thee, I repine, I murmur, I complain of thy providence; I apply to creatures for relief, but all my endeavours

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vours are vain, they are all as weak, as wretched as myſelf. O my Saviour, it is high time for me to give ear to thy ſweet invitation. As I bear the title of being thy diſciple, and even glory in it, it is high time for me to fulfil the duties it impoſes, and aſſiduouſly to attend to my heavenly maſter. I am ſick, and my ſickneſs is perhaps an inveterate one, but thou art my phyſician, I need only ſhew myſelf to thee, with one word thou canſt heal me, and thou calleſt and attracteſt me to thee that thou mayeſt pronounce it.

Who, beſides a God-Man, could unite ſo much power with ſo much charity? Who elſe could promiſe a ready and ſovereign remedy for all the evils that afflict human nature? Neither thy prophets, nor thy apoſtles, nor any of thy ſaints were ever ſo preſumptuous. They were men like us, ſubject to the ſame miſeries, and they ſunk, as we do, under the weight of their exiſtence. One of them exclaimed: *Unhappy man that I am, who ſhall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord**. They all acknowledged thee to be the author of their cure: and thou art not leſs bounteous nor leſs mighty towards me, than thou wert towards them.

* Rom. vii. 24, 25.

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But, moſt gracious Saviour, allow me to aſk in what manner thou refreſheſt thoſe who come to thee? Doſt thou remove their pains, doſt thou free them from all burden? And yet thy ſaints ſuffered, and even proportionably more than others. In what ſenſe therefore is it true that thou didſt refreſh them? From every quarter I learn, that the life of a chriſtian is a life of croſſes and afflictions; this thou repeateſt in every page of thy goſpel, and thyſelf, our only model, throughout thy whole life, didſt carry a heavier croſs than that of all the ſaints put together. How then, and by what hidden means doeſt thou aſſuage thoſe ſufferings which thou wouldſt have us endure? I think I underſtand it. There are ſufferings which thou entirely removeſt, and they are the keeneſt; I mean the remorſes of a racked conſcience, and the tyranny of our paſſions. Thy grace alſo frees us totally from the load of our ſins, and from the ſeverity of thy judgments, which they have deſerved. As to our other ſufferings, whether they proceed from exterior cauſes, or from our own imperfections; thou gradually mitigateſt the reluctance which they occaſion in a heart that is docile to thy grace; thou teacheſt our will a due ſubmiſſion to them, thou even inſpireſt us with a love for them; thou tempereſt them with heavenly conſolations, and cauſeſt them to be ſwallowed up

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in torrents of ineffable delights; thus do they ceaſe to be ſufferings to one who is ſubmiſſive, ſtrengthened, comforted, and abundantly repaid, through his love for thee, and thine for him, for all that he ſuffers for thee. This thy apoſtle teſtifies, when he ſays, *I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation* *.

If I have not as yet experienced this happineſs, if my troubles till now have ſeemed inſupportable, if I have added to my guilt, without alleviating my pains, I have no one to blame but myſelf; from this moment I reſolve to put an end to my miſery as well as to my ſin; I come to thee more criminal than wretched, in full confidence of obtaining pardon of my ſins, and relief in my diſtreſſes. I have been, till now, my own greateſt enemy; and ſince a ray of thy light begins to dawn upon me, I am determined to follow it, whitherſoever it ſhall direct me. Who can prevent me? for thou haſt ſaid; *They that are in health need not a phyſician, but they that are ill;—for I am not come to call the juſt, but ſinners* †.

* 2 Cor. vii. 4. † Matth. ix. 12, 13.

JESUS

JESUS CHRIST IS OUR ONLY MASTER.

ONE is your maſter, Chriſt *. This thou haſt pronounced, and thy heavenly Father has commanded us all to liſten to thee. Maſter of our reaſon, thou alone enlighteneſt every man that cometh into this world. Maſter of our heart, thou alone purifieſt and ruleſt its affections; a maſter infinitely wiſe, thy leſſons are within the reach of thy ſcholars, and bear a proportion with their underſtanding; thou gaineſt and captivateſt them with thy charms and inſpirations; thou art a ſafe and an infallible maſter, in whom we can place an unbounded confidence, for thou canſt not deceive; thou only teacheſt what is beneficial, and even indiſpenſible, and what ſolely tends to promote our happineſs; thou ſpeakeſt to the heart without the uſe of words, and requireſt of us no more than a willingneſs to be taught; in an inſtant thy leſſons have effect, and lay the moſt ſolid foundation of peace and felicity; thou art always preſent, and ready to inſtruct us, as often as we are willing to liſten to thee: thou ſeeſt all things, thou admoniſheſt in every thing, thou correcteſt whatever is defective; thou perfecteſt every thing; thou encourageſt our weakeſt endeavours, thou approveſt what is commendable, and

* Matth. xxiii. 10.

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and only reproveſt to excite us to better deeds; thou makeſt our ſatisfaction thy own concern, which thou unrelentingly purſueſt, until it is accompliſhed; requiring no more on our part than a ſimple and faithful co-operation: thou manageſt our wills with equal ſweetneſs and efficacy, and carefully preſerveſt the uſe of our liberty; thou inſpireſt us with the will of doing what thou commandeſt, and prepareſt us through love to the obedience we owe to thee. Thou art, moreover, a maſter who haſt firſt practiſed the doctrine which thou cameſt to teach us; thy life is our model; thou haſt firſt walked in the path, in which thou wouldſt have us follow; thus leaving us no room to juſtify our remiſſneſs. In ſhort, thou art a maſter and a judge infinitely juſt, and equally magnificent in rewarding our good deeds, which thou valueſt according to the purity, the uprightneſs, and the excellence of the motives that actuate us, before whom an earneſt deſire is equivalent to its effect, an effort equivalent to ſucceſs, and a deſign equivalent to the execution, if we can go no farther.

Such is the maſter, or to ſpeak with one of thy prophets, ſuch is the guide and preceptor which God has given me in thy adorable perſon. And to be in a manner on a level with thy diſciples, thou haſt vouchſafed to become man, and excluſive of ſin, thou haſt choſen to reſemble

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ſemble them in every thing elſe. Does not ſo affable and condeſcending a Maſter, whoſe love for us has infinitely abaſed him beneath his own dignity, who only ſhews himſelf as man, the more eaſily to draw us to God, deſerve to be liſtened to, obeyed, and followed? And what an exceſs of blindneſs and folly would it be, to ſlight or reject him; to cenſure his leſſons, or interpret them at pleaſure; and, for the regulation of my conduct, to chooſe only ſuch as are the moſt commodious. This, however, is exactly the line which I have hitherto purſued; my faith reproaches me, and my conſcience condemns me. Where is he to be found, who in this reſpect does not feel guilty! And if the greateſt ſaints did not think themſelves innocent, ſhall I, a ſinner, a ſlothful, tepid and diſſipated chriſtian, I who have never thought of ſtudying the doctrine of my Divine Maſter, much leſs of liſtening to him in my interiour; I who have turned a deaf ear to his inſtructions, and have habitually reſiſted his inſpirations; I to whom my corrupt nature, my ſenſes, a perverſe world, my own ſelf-opinion and will, have been my only maſters, can I remain compoſed, and think myſelf free from blame? How great would be my illuſion did I admit of ſuch a thought!

O Lord grant me grace henceforward to ſtyle thee my maſter with as much truth and effu-

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ſion of heart as Magdalene did. Inſpire me with an ardent deſire of liſtening to thee; let my mind be taken up with the meditation of thy goſpel; let the light it contains ſhine upon me, and keep my heart conſtantly attentive to thy inward leſſons. Grant me due reſpect for the miniſters of thy word, who teach me in thy name; and may I ſovereignly deſpiſe all thoſe profane doctors who combat thy maxims with the maxims of that world which thou haſt condemned and excluded from thy prayer. My preſent intention is to take no ſtep of myſelf in the work of my ſalvation; I mean to conſult and obey thee in every thing, and faithfully to practiſe all the leſſons thou ſhalt be pleaſed to read to me, either for the amendment of my faults, or for the acquiring of thoſe virtues which thou cameſt to teach. But thou muſt aſſiſt my weakneſs. The more elevated my deſign is, the more do I feel unable to execute it. With thy grace I can do all. But ſtill I ſhall fall; I expect no other; yet I hope leſs frequently, and alſo leſs heavily; I will humble myſelf when faulty, and will try to amend; at leaſt the ſincerity of my will, and the aſſiduity of my endeavours, will in ſome degree be a proof, that I do not glory in vain in being thy diſciple.

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JESUS CHRIST, THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE.

THOU haſt ſaid, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life* *. How profound and extenſive is the meaning of theſe words! Grant me a due underſtanding of them.

Before thy coming into the world, all mankind, excluſive of one nation, being made over to the corruption of their heart, were bewildered in their own ways; at every ſtep they wandered more and more from the truth, and the errors which beguiled them, plunged them into eternal death. They were buried in idolatry, in falſe ſyſtems of philoſophy, and wallowed in innumerable vices. On appearing upon the earth, thou announcedeſt thyſelf both by thy words and actions both as legiſlator and doctor to men, as being thyſelf the way in which they were to walk, and the only rule which they were to follow. Thou haſt ſpoken with an authority which belonged only to a God made man. Thou haſt aſſerted thy divinity by numberleſs conſpicuous miracles, and wonderful predictions which have been accompliſhed. Thou haſt diſſipated the clouds of error and falſehood, by ſhewing to mankind, in thy divine perſon, the eternal, the eſſential truth,

* John, xiv. 6.

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truth, the only truth which it was their great intereſt to be acquainted with, that truth from which all other truths flow, and in which they are all reſolved. Through thy grace thou haſt brought their ſouls to the true life, which is no other than thyſelf, and which they cannot poſſeſs but through an union with thee.

The happineſs of the ſoul is its life, as its miſery is its death; the poſſeſſion of the ſovereign good, is its happineſs, as the privation of this ſovereign good, is its miſery. As thou art God, thou art therefore the ſovereign good, and the happineſs and the life of the ſoul: and as there is nothing real nor true but that which is good, ſo the ſovereign good is ſovereignly true. That which is evil has no exiſtence of itſelf, it is nothing more than the abſence of that which is good where it ought to be found. Error and falſehood belong to that which is evil, as truth and reality appertain to that which is good. As God, and as the ſovereign good, thou art therefore the ſovereign truth, the ſource as well as the term of all truth. We are all in ſearch of this truth and wiſh to find it, becauſe we deſire and ſeek for happineſs, which is no where to be found but in truth. But we are ignorant of the way that leads to both the one and the other. And we ſhould ſtill be in ignorance, hadſt thou not become man, and taught us by thy doctrine, by thy example,

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example, by thy lights and inſpirations which thou haſt beſtowed upon us, the way that leads to the truth and to the life, that is, to the eternal poſſeſſion of thy divinity. We therefore owe all we poſſeſs to thy holy humanity, without which, error and real death, the death of the ſoul, would have been our lot for ever.

O my Saviour, is ſo great a bleſſing to become uſeleſs to me, and inſtead of promoting my happineſs, is it to be a cauſe of my ruin, either from a neglect or an abuſe of it? If thou art the way, if we cannot go to the Father and obtain his heavenly kingdom but through thee, why have I not begun to walk in that way, by following thy inſtructions and examples, and correſponding with thy graces; or if I have ever walked in it, why have I deviated from it? Why have I followed thee with ſo much remiſſneſs and reluctance, as if I had been dragged to it by an external impulſe? Why do I ſtop ſhort, or repeatedly ſtumble in the way? If thou art the truth, how comes it that my heart that is made for the truth, that only eſteems and wiſhes for the truth, does not ardently embrace thee, and inſeparably adhere to thee? If thou art the life, if my ſoul cannot be in peace, joy or happineſs, but through thee and in thee, how comes it that I do not inceſſantly apply to that fountain of life? Why do I delight to dwell in the region of death?

Why

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Why do I chooſe to try to draw food from myſelf or any created object, though experience convinces me that nothing beſides thee can either ſatiate or refreſh me?

Heavenly Jeſus, be unto me in future, my only way. Grant me to know thee, to ſtudy thee, to walk indefatigably in thy footſteps, to practiſe thy laws and form myſelf upon thy virtues. Suffer not this my prayer to be vague and ineffectual; ſuffer it not to be inceſſantly interrupted, and as often reſumed; a prayer of that kind would only ſhew the weakneſs and inconſtancy of my will.

Heavenly Jeſus, be thou my light and my truth, give me a clear knowledge that whatever is not thee, is error and darkneſs; that I myſelf am a compound of illuſion and blindneſs, and that my own ſelf-opinion is my greateſt enemy. Teach me to cheriſh that pure truth that is unmixed with any ſhade of error; that truth that knows neither flattery nor diſguiſe; that truth that throws a light on my conſcience with reſpect to my duties, and reproaches me with the tranſgreſſion of even the ſmalleſt of them. Thy tribunal, O eternal Truth, is in my heart; there thou inſtructeſt, rectifyeſt, approveſt and condemneſt me. There alſo do I mean to liſten to thee, to conſult thee, to take thee for the invariable rule of all my opinions, words and actions. O truth, how

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how wretched ſhould I be, did I become thy enemy! How wretched ſhould I be did I try to bend thee to my own inclinations! How wretched ſhould I be did I turn from thee after having once acknowledged thee. Whatever is within me tends to ſeduce and vitiate that original rectitude which came from thee. On all ſides am I ſurrounded with ſnares, with thoſe of the fleſh and its allurements, with thoſe of worldlings and their perverſe maxims, with thoſe of the father of lies, and his evil ſuggeſtions. Teach me, O Lord, to guard againſt their contagion, and never to deviate from the path of truth.

Heavenly Jeſus, be thou the life of my ſoul: may it live only through thee, as my body lives through it. Preſide thou over all its motions, ſentiments and reſolutions. Be thou, not only the object, but alſo the principle of its thoughts, wiſhes and actions. I make over to thee all its faculties, that thou mayeſt animate them, govern them, and prevent them from ever acting but under the direction of thy grace. When thou ſhalt become its ſpring of action and its only mover, then I ſhall truly live; which life, if I preſerve upon earth, always in apprehenſion and in danger of loſing it, I ſhall be put in a calm, ſafe and unalterable poſſeſſion of it in eternity. Amen.

JESUS

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JESUS AT THE DOOR OF OUR HEART.

*BEHOLD, I ſtand at the gate, and knock, if any man ſhall hear my voice and open to me the door, I will come in to him, and will ſup with him, and he with me.** Thus haſt thou expreſſed thyſelf in the revelation thou haſt made to thy favourite diſciple. Of all the words thou haſt uttered, I know none that are more affable, gracious and affectionate. Is it poſſible that a God ſhould make uſe of ſuch expreſſions in behalf of his creatures? A language like this from a prince to his ſubject would fill us with aſtoniſhment; we ſhould think it a degradation of majeſty. But God, who is infinite in love and condeſcenſion, knows how far he may abaſe himſelf to men, without diſparagement to his grandeur. Not only are theſe the words of Chriſt, but he fulfils them daily, notwithſtanding the inſenſibility and obſtinacy of our hearts. O Lord, refuſe me not the meaning of theſe heavenly words; refuſe me not a reliſh for them; but more eſpecially give me ſome idea of the ſentiment with which thy heart has pronounced them, and ceaſes not to put them in execution.

It is then true, ſinner as I am, or rather becauſe I am a ſinner, that thou, who art holineſs itſelf, and infinitely abominateſt ſin, but art

* Ap. iii. 20.

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art all compaſſion for ſinners; it is true, I ſay, that when by my offences I have baniſhed thee from my heart and brought myſelf to a ſtate of death and damnation, thou aſſiduouſly ſtandeſt at the door of my heart, where by remorſes, pious thoughts and holy inſpirations, thou knockeſt in order to gain admiſſion. This goodneſs is incomprehenſible; but the *inſolence* with which I reject thee and refuſe thee admittance, is ſtill more incomprehenſible. Great King of Glory, is it poſſible that a baſe ſlave ſhould treat thee in this manner, and that thou ſhouldſt expoſe thyſelf to ſuch indignities? That he ſhould drive thee from his heart, after thou haſt vouchſafed to dwell in it, is alone a heinous affront which he offers to thee: but, that after he has driven thee away, he ſhould reſiſt thy advances and ſolicitations; that he ſhould ſuffer thee repeatedly and for years to knock for admittance without his being willing to grant it; that thou ſhouldſt go in ſearch of him, and that he ſhould obſtinately and deliberately perſiſt in rejecting thee; that thou notwithſtanding ſhouldſt not tire, that thou ſhouldſt continue to knock, that thou ſhouldſt aſk it as a favour that he would allow thee to enter again, that thou ſhouldſt wait with an invincible patience until he grants thy requeſt, is a manner of acting both on thy part and on his, which cannot be comprehended. Ah! what

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what mighty intereſt then engages thee in the purſuit of this rebellious and obdurate heart? Is thy happineſs annexed to the poſſeſſion of it? or rather does not thy glory ſeem to require that thou ſhouldſt return contempt for contempt?

And thou, ſinner, didſt thou feel the loſs thou haſt ſuſtained, by baniſhing thy Saviour and thy God; didſt thou ſee thy poverty, thy nakedneſs, thy deplorable ſtate; ſhouldſt thou not run after him, call him back, and engage him by every means to return? Thou doſt not do it, thou even canſt not do it, without the help of his grace; but that is not wanting to thee, and thy crime conſiſts in rejecting its *impulſe*.

How wretched ſhould I be, O my God, if covered with confuſion at the ſight of my long reſiſtance, if moved at thy goodneſs in coming to me, in ſeeking me, in waiting for me, in ſupporting my refuſals, I did not at laſt open to thee the door of my heart, where thou haſt ſo long been knocking!

If any man ſhall hear my voice, and open to me the door, I will come in to him, and will ſup with him, and he with me. It is not to ſhew me a coolneſs, it is not to upbraid me or to puniſh my ingratitude that thou wiſheſt to reſume thy former ſtation in my heart; it is to reſtore me to thy favour, and load me with careſſes, it is

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to make me taſte the pureſt delights, it is to treat me with the greateſt familiarity, and with a kind of equality. But what a feaſt, O my Saviour, what exquiſite meats doſt thou ſet before a ſinner who conſents to admit thee again! With what viand doſt thou ſate him, with what wine doſt thou inebriate him! With the ſame viand, with the ſame wine with which thy ſacred humanity is fed at thy Heavenly Father's table. This Magdalene, Auſtin and many other converted ſinners have experienced, and why may I not be of the number? It depends upon me; thou art rich in mercy to all thoſe who invoke thee, and return to thee with ſincerity of heart.

But, O Lord, if ſuch be thy goodneſs towards penitent ſinners, what muſt it be towards the righteous who have never forſaken thee? Ah! the brother of the prodigal grew envious at the reception which his father gave him, he was jealous, and even indignant at it. But he had no cauſe. *My ſon*, ſaid the good father, *thou art always with me, and all I have is thine.** If the conſolations which God beſtows upon ſinners on their return to him, be more lively and ſenſible; thoſe which he imparts to chaſte and innocent ſouls are more pure, ſweet and intimate. The very trials which thoſe innocent ſo ls experience, are turned into favours, which they

* Luke xv. 31.

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they prefer to the moſt endearing careſſes. Let us be ſilent on the graces which Jeſus grants to his deareſt friends; he treats them as he has been treated by his Father, he, who is the beloved Son, the object of his eternal complacency.

O Lord, if it be pleaſing to thee to be with me, may it not be leſs ſo to me to be with thee. Never permit me to baniſh thee from my heart; and ſhould I ever be ſo unfortunate, may I ſpeedily repair my loſs, may I make thee due ſatisfaction by my eagerneſs in calling thee back and receiving thee again. Teach me not only to retain thee in my ſoul, but alſo to render the abode more and more agreeable, and to lodge thee in its moſt intimate affections: teach me to purify it from whatever in the leaſt can diſpleaſe thee, and to adorn with every virtue a place which thou honoureſt with thy preſence.

THE CHARACTER OF THE SHEEP OF CHRIST.

THOU art the good ſhepherd, who giveſt thy life for thy ſheep; who feedeſt them with thy body and thy blood; who incorporateſt them with thyſelf, ſo as to be their head, and they thy members. Thoſe ſheep, which thy father has given thee, and which no one ſhall ſnatch out

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out of thy hand, have a diſtinguiſhing character by which I may eaſily diſcern whether I belong to thy flock. *My ſheep*, doſt thou ſay, *hear my voice and follow me. I know mine, and mine know me, as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father.**

My ſoul, doſt thou underſtand this properly? The ſheep of Jeſus Chriſt are the elect whom the Father has given to his Son, whom the Son has purchaſed with his blood, who never will be loſt, and will ſhare in his eternal felicity. Art thou or art thou not of the number of his ſheep? This is what it ſovereignly behoves thee to know. Chriſt himſelf points out to thee the mark by which thou mayeſt be aſſured of it. As long as thou retaineſt that mark, thou haſt nothing to fear; and if during this mortal life, thou wert not liable to be deceived by thy ſelf-love, thou mighteſt have certain proofs of thy ſalvation. Doſt thou acknowledge Jeſus Chriſt for thy ſhepherd? Art thou attentive to his voice? Doſt thou follow him whereſoever he leads thee? And ſhouldſt thou chance at any time in the leaſt to ſtray, doſt thou return at the firſt ſignal, and range thyſelf under his crook? If ſo, continue in thy obedience, and it will be crowned.

But, in the firſt place, do not miſtake the illuſions of thy heart for the voice of Jeſus Chriſt,

* Joan. x. 3. 4. 15.

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Chriſt, as the proud heretic does, who, being ſeparated from the church, pretends to ſee inſpirations of the ſpirit of light, in the manifeſt ſeductions of the ſpirit of darkneſs; nor be thou like too many ſelf-conceited ſouls, who obſtinate in their notions, imagine that Chriſt leads them, whilſt they lead themſelves, and thus are miſled by their ſelf-love. Whoſoever ranks on the ſide which the church has condemned, whoſoever even in the church leans too much on his own opinion in the concern of his ſalvation, as well as of his perfection, deviates from the character of the ſheep of Chriſt, proportionably to his preſumption, and hazards his happineſs according to the importance of the objects in which his own judgment is his rule.

In the ſecond place, even ſuppoſing in thyſelf that docility which is eſſential, thou ſtill muſt be careful not to withdraw thyſelf in the leaſt article that is the will of thy heavenly guide. Thou muſt not ſay; this is not of conſequence; in this I may refuſe obedience, without endangering my ſalvation. Who knows that what may ſeem inconſiderable, will not prove fatal in them? Great misfortunes originate from afar; mortal diſeaſes often come from cauſes that at firſt ſeemed ſlight and trivial. Do not therefore habituate thyſelf to turn a deaf ear, even in the ſmalleſt trifles.

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If on ſuch occaſions, in contempt of thy ſhepherd, thou followeſt thy own will, thou wilt be ſoon tempted to follow it on more important occaſions, and thou wilt yield to the temptation. Chriſt does not ſay, that his ſheep make diſtinction of voices; that they liſten to his voice in points that are eſſential, but neglect it in others. He does not ſay, they confine themſelves to the rigour of the precept, and to what they cannot tranſgreſs without imminent danger of perdition; a diſpoſition of this kind is infinitely pernicious, and he who deliberately perſiſts in it, has no reaſon to flatter himſelf that he belongs to Chriſt. To belong to him, we muſt be determined at all times to liſten to him in every thing, we muſt follow him whereever he conducts, and keep as cloſe to him as poſſible.

Is this the principle of my conduct? If not, I have no moral aſſurance that I am one of my Saviour's ſheep; and as long as I am deſtitute of this comfortable aſſurance, what peace can I enjoy upon earth? It can only be a falſe and illuſory peace. Pardon, O Lord, pardon what is paſt. From this moment I reſolve to be one of thy ſheep, and put on the character of one. It ſhall be my firſt rule, and moſt indiſpenſable duty to be attentive to thy voice, and faithful in following it. Speak to me, O Lord, it no longer will be in vain

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that thou doſt, for thy ſervant hears thee; he is ready to obey thee, without making any diſtinction between great and little things, between an abſolute commandment, and the ſmalleſt indication of thy holy will. O my good Shepherd, inſpire me through thy grace with this reſolution, render me faithful in perſiſting in it, and in increaſing it. Heavenly Maſter, behold my ſoul is open to thy leſſons; grant that I may underſtand, that I may reliſh and practiſe them.

FIRST

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FIRST LESSON.

ON DOING PENANCE.

*Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**. With this didſt thou begin thy preaching. John, thy precurſor, had alſo begun his miſſion with the ſame words. Thou didſt find nothing but ſinners even in that nation which God had choſen for himſelf, which he had ſeparated from all the reſt, which he governed by his law, which he had made the depoſitory of his promiſes, and which expected thee as its deliverer; and amongſt thoſe ſinners the moſt guilty and the moſt incorrigible, were thoſe who falſly flattered themſelves that they were righteous. If thou wert in theſe days to appear among chriſtians, what wouldſt thou find? Sinners of every age and condition, and even in the moſt holy profeſſions; proud Phariſees and deluded devotees, full of ſelf-eſteem, and of contempt for their neighbours. And what elſe couldſt thou announce to them but penance?

But what is penance? A change of heart, that brings on a change of life. A deteſtation and an expiation of the paſt, followed by an amendment for the future. This change of heart

* Math. iv. 17.

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heart is ſtyled converſion, becauſe the ſoul that before was turned towards ſenſible objects, turns itſelf entirely towards God, and adheres ſolely to him; every thing elſe is the ſequel of this converſion, when it is ſincere and durable.

The firſt leſſon, then, that thou readeſt to man, is that he ſhould enter into himſelf by ſerious reflections; that he ſhould diſcover the more or leſs unhappy ſtate he is in; that he ſhould humble himſelf and deplore his ſituation; that he ſhould recur to thy mercy with a bitter regret for having offended thee; that he ſhould return to thy favour through the means which thou offereſt him, and ſhould ſatisfy thy juſtice, which does not pardon the guilty, but as they are unwilling to ſpare themſelves.

But, O my God, to whom is not this leſſon neceſſary? Who does not ſtand in need of converſion? Some have to return to the ſtate of grace from that of ſin; others from the ſtate of tepidity to that of fervour; there are ſome who have ſtill to acquire a knowledge of the extent of their duties, which till now they have tranſgreſſed almoſt without ſcruple; others again have to join to their exteriour devotion, the only one which they have hitherto practiſed, that which is interiour, which is the ſoul of the other, and without which the other is but a ſource of ſuperſtition, illuſion, ſtubbornneſs,

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and caprice, the nutriture of self-love and of pride, which corrects no faults, nor even the most dangerous vices. How rare are those christians, even among those who profess a peculiar holiness, who may not be ranked in some one of these classes? If I examine myself narrowly, I shall soon find out to which class I belong.

I therefore must reform and do penance. If I am a sinner, I must detest and acknowledge my sins; bitter as the medicine may be, I must take it; I must atone for past offences, by the humbling and painful satisfactions, which shall be enjoined me; I must resolutely break through those chains that hold me captive, and become quite free; I must take proper measures to avoid every occasion of a relapse, and of opening my wounds anew; I must faithfully and constantly follow every salutary advice, and accept every remedy, that shall be prescribed for my cure. Should I not do as much for the health of my soul, as I do for that of my body? Can I be so blind as to set a greater value on a perishable life, which, in spite of all my precautions, I may be deprived of at every instant, than on a life that is spiritual, and is a certain pledge of a happy immortality, which it is in my power to acquire and preserve, and which I cannot lose, unless I am willing to lose it.

If

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If I am tepid, I must examine into the causes of my tepidity; I must reflect on the danger of that unhappy state, and on the extreme difficulty of quitting it, if in the least habitual; I must ponder the evident risk I run of forming an erroneous conscience, of becoming blind and obdurate, and through my bad disposition, of rendering the sacraments and all other means of salvation useless and unprofitable. I must reflect on the fatal consequence of obstinately resisting the holy spirit, on the privation of all special graces which are no ways due to slothful and careless servants; on the slow but progressive coolness, and, perhaps, at last the irremediable loss of his friendship; on my extreme weakness in delicate occasions, and in violent temptations; in a word, I must dread the imminent danger I am in of falling into mortal sin, and the moral impossibility there is of rising again from it. I must also bring into consideration every motive that is capable of animating me to fervour; I must think on the graces which I formerly received, on the happiness I enjoyed when faithful in God's service; on the holiness of my profession and of my engagements; on the good example that is set me by others, and on that which I owe to them; in short, I must take in every general and particular consideration that can make impression on my heart, and rekindle in

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it the love of God: I must take every resolution that is necessary for a solid and total reform, and use such means as may secure success. What a number of things must be done to recover from this languid state, which, of all the maladies of the soul, is perhaps the most incurable? And among those who labour under it, how few are there who obtain a radical cure; because in one sense they are less sincere in their endeavours towards a reform, than great sinners are to bring about their conversion; and because they are less sensible of their unhappy situation.

If the ignorance of the duties annexed to my state of life, be the cause of my failings; an ignorance which is much more common than can well be imagined, I must resolve, in good earnest, to study my obligations, and fit myself for a discharge of them. And how frequently does it happen that the same individual person has a variety of duties to fulfil? Domestic duties of husband, father, and master; public duties, from our station in life, from our profession, from the authority we have, from our connexions with our neighbour in the different branches of affairs, without mentioning those duties, which are in common with every christian, and which arise from numberless particular circumstances. All these I must be well acquainted with, without which, I shall be responsible for my own, as well as the

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the delinquencies of others, which my ignorance may occasion. What an ample subject is this for reflection, for a reform, and for penance to whosoever means to be saved, and is well convinced that the discharge of his duties is essential to salvation.

Lastly, I must carefully examine into the nature of my devotion, and see if it be not subject to many faults; I must be diffident, in this point, of my own opinion, character and prejudices; I must faithfully expose to a prudent and discreet director, the notions I have formed of the service which I owe to God, and be willing to be formed to a solid, inward, and steady devotion, that chiefly tends to the mortification of the heart, and to an union with God. I must do penance for a devotion that is censorious, uncharitable, capricious, and haughty; for a devotion that is scrupulous in trifles and careless in matters of consequence, that is obstinate and selfish, pharisaical and hypocritical. And where are those to be found, who, making profession of piety, carry their attention to all these objects, and are persuaded that their very devotion should be to them a matter of sorrow and expiation? A detail of the sad consequences arising from a mistaken devotion would be endless, whether they be considered with a reference to domestic happiness, or to public edification.

Ah!

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Ah! if we ſeriouſly meant to do penance; if we really thought that we ſtood in need of it; if we did not perform our religious duties only through cuſtom; if we were willing to be inſtructed and corrected; if in the choice of a director, we conſulted purely the ſpirit of God, and the deſire of our ſpiritual advancement; in ſhort, if we omitted nothing to be well acquainted with ourſelves, and to amend, chriſtianity would ſoon put on a different aſpect, and not only would great diſorders ceaſe, but a real and unfeigned holineſs would reign in every condition, to the great emolument both of domeſtic and civil ſociety.

It is chiefly to bring chriſtians to do penance, that Spiritual Retreats were eſtabliſhed: an admirable inſtitution, which at firſt was productive of moſt wonderful effects, but which of late, like every thing elſe, has degenerated. Nevertheleſs how beneficial and even neceſſary would it not be to ſinners, as well as to tepid chriſtians who ſincerely wiſh their converſion, to thoſe alſo who are ignorant of their duties, and even to thoſe who make profeſſion of piety, were they to ſet apart one week in the year, to make a ſerious, exact, and circumſtantial review, not only of their ſins, but alſo of their motives of conduct, of their inward diſpoſitions and views in the ſervice of God, of the rules which they follow in practice, of the alterations

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terations which ought to be made, either from bad to good, or from good to better, in short, of all that in their present state can be a hindrance or a help to their progress in virtue? Such retreats duly performed could not fail sowing good seeds in the soul, which in the course of the year would fructify, and so from one year to another we should strengthen, advance, and grow perfect.

Let us therefore do penance, and persevere in so doing the remainder of our life. *The life of a christian*, says Tertullian, *should be a continual penance*, because at all times he has sins to deplore, temptations to overcome, virtues to acquire, God's wrath to deprecate, and *his* mercy to implore. Let us therefore hasten so to do; because our Saviour adds, that *the kingdom of heaven* is at hand. This kingdom of heaven is either the gospel, or the preaching of it, or the church, or eternal felicity. Which ever way we conceive it, the kingdom of heaven's being at hand, is to all a pressing motive to excite us to penance. And in fact what would the preaching of the gospel avail us, if we did not understand it; and we cannot understand either its excellence, extent, depth or sublimity, but in proportion as we are clean of heart; and it is by penance that the heart is purified; first, from sins and vices, and then from faults and imperfections. It is a maxim well worthy of attention, which in itself

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ſelf is inconteſtable, and confirmed by experience; that cleanneſs of heart is the meaſure of the knowledge of the goſpel morality. If the kingdom of heaven be the church, a ſinner cannot belong to the ſoul of the church, unleſs through penance he be reſtored to the ſtate of grace; and the juſt man is ſo much the more united to her, as he is advanced in the way of penance and inward mortification. As to the kingdom of heaven which is properly ſo called, it is clear, that penance opens the gates of it to the generality of chriſtians; that it ſerves as a purgatory to the moſt innocent ſouls; and that ſinners, as well as the juſt, will be elevated in glory, according to the degree of penance, which they ſhall have attained to upon earth.

Let us then immediately begin, for it is a preſſing duty, to underſtand the goſpel, and to acquire daily a more perfect knowledge of it, that we may practiſe it the better: it is a preſſing duty to be united by ſanctifying grace to the ſoul of the church, and gradually to ſtrengthen our union by an increaſe of that grace: it is a preſſing duty to be at all times prepared for an eternal reward; becauſe at every moment death may ſurpriſe us; becauſe it infallibly will ſurpriſe us, if from day to day we delay; becauſe a tardy and forced penance will not avail us; and, alſo, becauſe though we died in the ſtate of grace, we ſhall loſe

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loſe as many degrees of glory, as we ſhall have failed to acquire degrees of purity, through the practice of penance.

O my Saviour, I now begin to ſee how neceſſary penance is, even in its full extent; I now ſee that I ſhould let ſlip no moment without practiſing it; I ſee that I ſhould make thee amends for my paſt conduct, by the fervour of my penance. How can I think myſelf diſpenſed from it, when I conſider that thou haſt choſen to be born, to live and to die in the greateſt penance, which thy love engaged thee to do for me? Alas! O Lord, what would my penance be without thine! What could it repair? What could it merit? And if I do *not* tread in thy footſteps as a penitent, what ſhare can I have in thy ſatisfaction, and how could it be applicable to me?

Do not permit me to go farther on without making a proper uſe of this important leſſon. Of what avail would the other leſſons be, if I neglected this, which is introductory to them? Grant me, therefore, to enter the career of penance; but let it be under thy direction: let thy light guide me in every internal and external practice which I ought to embrace; let thy grace accompany and ſupport me; let thy wiſdom direct me; let thy example animate me; let thy love add its conſolations; and, at laſt let thy mercy crown my perſeverance. *Amen.*

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SECOND LESSON.

MAN LOSES ALL, IF HE LOSES HIS SOUL.

WHAT does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and ſuffer the loſs of his own ſoul? or what exchange ſhall a man give for his ſoul ?* How cogent a motive for penance and chriſtian vigilance is this thy ſentence, O Lord! I am not ſurpriſed that thy apoſtle, who felt the full force of it, ſhould warn us to work our ſalvation with fear and trembling. How can we avoid trembling, in the continual danger we are in of loſing our ſoul. If we do not fear, it is becauſe we either reflect not on the magnitude of ſuch a loſs, or on the dangers that threaten us at every moment. Let us here conſider the firſt of theſe truths. Should we loſe every thing elſe, all is ſaved, if we ſave our ſoul; but were we to gain the whole world, if we loſe our ſoul, we loſe all. The loſs of fortune, honour, or life itſelf, is abſolutely nothing; the loſs of the ſoul alone is ſomething; becauſe it is a loſs that embraces every misfortune, a loſs that is eternal, a loſs irretrievable, a loſs that nothing poſſibly can compenſate. In vain might I have at my diſpoſal all the treaſures of the earth; in vain might I offer

* Matth. xvi. 26.

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offer them in exchange for my ſoul, I never could recover it, once having loſt it; the poſſeſſion of all things beſides, never cauld alleviate my miſery. Unfold to me, O Divine Maſter, this important leſſon, and imprint it ſo deeply on my heart, that it may never be effaced.

Liſten, my diſciple, thou art going to ſee that thy own reaſon ſets before thee, what my revelation teaches thee on this head. Recollect thyſelf for a while, and conſult thy heart. Thou haſt no ſurer rule of truth, than thy own intimate, habitual, and invariable ſentiments.

The deſire of happineſs is within thee, it is always within thee, and neceſſarily muſt be within thee. Thou wouldſt not be either an intelligent or a free being; thou wouldſt not have either a knowledge, or a reflexed love of thyſelf, if thou didſt not wiſh to be happy, and even with a happineſs that is ſuitable to thy nature, acknowledged by thy reaſon, and becoming its dignity. This is the eſſence of thy moral exiſtence. Happineſs is the object of all thy pretenſions, the ſcope of all thy ſteps, the principle of the continual agitation of thy heart, which has no other tendency than towards happineſs, no other affection than for what it thinks can lead to it, and no other averſion than from what ſeems againſt it. Thou

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mayſt be deceived in the choice of objects, by thy ſenſes, paſſions, and prejudices, and ſeek for happineſs where it is not to be found; but ſtill it is happineſs that thou art in ſearch of, nor canſt thou wiſh for any thing elſe.

Thou wiſheſt to be always happy, and conſequently always to exiſt. Hence, notwithſtanding the ſhortneſs of thy life, thou formeſt boundleſs projects; thou lookeſt into ages to come; thou experienceſt a ſenſe of immortality; thou feeleſt a natural horror of death; thou indulgeſt the pleaſing idea of ſurviving in thy children, and of ſubſiſting after thy diſſolution in the remembrance of men. Nothing of all this wouldſt thou experience, were thy exiſtence to end with this life. Thou ſetteſt no bounds to the duration of thy being, nor to thy happineſs.

Thou wiſheſt to be happy, and with a happineſs that anſwers to the infinite capacity of thy heart; with a happineſs that leaves no room for any farther wiſh; with a happineſs that fills and completely ſatisfies all the faculties of thy ſoul: and upon this account no enjoyment of the objects here below can give thee content; for when thou haſt obtained them, thou wiſheſt for more, and findeſt thyſelf more empty than ever, at the time thou wert fancying that thou wert wholly ſated. This thou haſt often experienced; and as often has

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has diſguſt taken place of thy enjoyments, as often have thy gratified deſires betrayed thee into freſh cravings.

Thou alſo wiſheſt a happineſs that no one can rob thee of, that no event can diſturb, or accident deprive thee of; and thy reaſon ſufficiently convinces thee, that the ſecurity which is eſſential to happineſs, is incompatible with the ſmalleſt degree of fear.

Now every thing concurs to demonſtrate, that a happineſs like this, cannot be met with upon earth; and that thy leading deſire, which excites and abſorbs every other, is never completely ſatisfied. Shouldſt thou be ignorant of this, it is owing to the want of reflection. Either the objects to which thou annexeſt thy felicity ſlip from thee, or ſhouldſt thou actually poſſeſs them, they may at every inſtant, ſlip from thee; or ſhould they not leave thee, death at every moment may ſnatch them from thee. Thy precarious and fleeting enjoyments only ſerve to blunt for a while, the troubleſome and habitual ſenſe of thy indigence.

Nevertheleſs, thou art born to be happy; and ſince thou canſt not be happy in this life, it follows that another life awaits thee, where this deſire will be ſated, if however thou ſhalt merit that it ſhould be ſo. For as this happineſs is in reſerve for another life, and as it bears no affinity with the periſhable things of this

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this world, it neceſſarily muſt be the reward of a virtue that includes the diſcharge of every duty, a reward which vice can no ways lay claim to. If happineſs be not perfection itſelf, it is at leaſt the inſeparable reſult of it, and whatever forwards or retards the one, forwards or retards the other.

Sound reaſon teaches every rational creature, the dogma of another life; it has been believed in all religions, howſoever falſe and abſurd in every other reſpect; all philoſophers of good ſenſe, have ſet it down as a capital point of their doctrine; and it never has been denied or called in queſtion, but by thoſe whoſe minds and hearts were equally vitiated. In ſhort, it is the voice of nature; and to rob man of the hope of another life, and of another felicity diſtinct from that which he fruitleſsly ſeeks for upon earth, is to rank him beneath the condition of brutes; it is to render the weight of his exiſtence abſolutely inſupportable; it is to impeach God of having beſtowed on him in vain both reaſon and free-will, and of having made him unhappy, from the very deſire which he had of being happy.

That which reaſon unfolds to thee but imperfectly and obſcurely, is ſet before thee by my revelation in a more diſtinct and determinate manner, and with greater certainty and evidence. It clearly gives thee to underſtand

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that thy happineſs is in the poſſeſſion of God alone; that thou art deſtined, through a bounty intirely gratuitous on his part, to behold him one day face to face, to contemplate his adorable perfections, to love him, to enjoy him as thy ſovereign good; that the joy reflecting from that contemplation and love will be perfect; that thou never wilt be in danger of loſing it; and that thou wilt be eternally ſure of being completely and unalterably happy.

It teaches thee alſo, that this happineſs is annexed to the good uſe thou ſhalt make of thy free-will here below; that God has placed thee for a while upon the earth, that thou mayeſt labour to render thyſelf worthy of ſuch an exalted deſtiny, through thy fidelity in the duties he preſcribes thee both relative to himſelf and thy fellow-creatures; that if thou continue to the end in his grace and friendſhip by thy love and obedience, thou wilt attain this ineffable happineſs, and wilt ſave thy ſoul; that on the contrary, if thou tranſgreſs his laws, if thou liveſt and dieſt in his diſgrace, thou ſhalt be for ever deprived of this happineſs, and ſhalt loſe thy ſoul. This loſs is termed damnation: that is to ſay, an eternal privation of thy ſovereign good.

Doſt thou rightly conceive this dreadful damnation? Doſt thou conceive what it is for an intelligent being to exiſt for ever, to be wiſhing

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wiſhing for ever to be happy, without a poſſibility of ever being ſo; to be moſt completely certain that he never will be ſo, not to have it in his power to divert his thought for one moment, from the conſideration of his unhappineſs; to be eternally reproaching himſelf for being the cauſe of his unhappineſs; and to be inceſſantly devoured with uſeleſs regrets, rage, and deſpair? Such is, and ſuch ever will be the condition of whoſoever loſes his ſoul. Although he had acquired the greateſt honours, riches, and pleaſures, what could they profit him after ſuch a loſs? Nothing of what he poſſeſſed will follow him after death; and the remembrance which he will retain of them, only will ſerve to torment him. Being ſtripped of every thing, he will have nothing left to offer in exchange to recover the ſoul which he has loſt. Here upon earth it is impoſſible for thee to have a full comprehenſion, much more to have a juſt ſentiment of ſuch an unhappineſs; the moſt painful loſſes are nothing when compared with that. But through meditation and reflection on what paſſes in thy heart, thou mayeſt underſtand enough of it, to know how important it is for thee to avoid it.

Learn, therefore, ſovereignly and ſolely to dread that which is thy ſovereign and thy only evil, an intimate evil, a boundleſs evil, an endleſs evil, an irreparable evil, a pure evil without any

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any mixture, without any hope of alleviation. Carefully preſerve this fear, entertain and nouriſh it; let it be to thee as a curb to the violence of thy paſſions; let it blunt in thee the vivacity of the impreſſions which come from ſenſible objects; let it ſupport thee in the conflicts thou haſt to engage in to overcome thy concupiſcence, and to reſiſt whatever may ſpur you on towards ſin. There is no temptation ſtrong enough to ſtand againſt this fear; there is no attractive powerful enough to counterbalance the effect of it; there is no effort of the world, the fleſh, and the devil, over which it will not render thee victorious. At leaſt, ſhould thy weakneſs be extreme, ſhouldſt thou *feel* thyſelf incapable of reſiſtance, this fear will induce thee to fly, and to place thy ſoul in ſafety, remote from the commerce and the danger of creatures.

O Lord, pierce my bones with this ſalutary fear; it is much that thou haſt inſtructed me, but let thy grace act on my heart. Above all, I wiſh to ſave my ſoul. It is my only poſſeſſion; every thing elſe is foreign to me; it alone belongs to me; I loſe all if I loſe it, and I ſhall loſe it, if I loſe the ſovereign good, which is no other than thyſelf. Inſpire me with an ardent love for this ſovereign good, with an unbounded deſire of poſſeſſing it, with an invincible courage to undertake every thing that can procure

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procure this poſſeſſion. Inſpire me with a contempt of all thoſe falſe allurements that preſent themſelves in its ſtead, to ſeduce and to loſe my ſoul; inſpire me with a hatred of that unhappy propenſity that ſways me towards ſenſible objects; inſpire me with the reſolution of combating within me, whatever is an obſtacle to my happineſs, and tends to plunge me into the eternal abyſs. Without thy aſſiſtance, what benefit can I reap from thy leſſons? Alas! they only will render me more guilty. Abandon me not, O my Saviour! of myſelf, I only can loſe myſelf, and I never ſhall be ſaved but through thee.

THIRD

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THIRD LESSON.

FROM THE HEART COME FORTH EVIL THOUGHTS.

LISTEN again, my disciple, and be attentive to this new lesson consigned in my gospel. *From the heart come forth evil thoughts.* The most efficacious way to save thy soul, is to be well convinced that the loss of it can only come from thyself, and consequently that it is necessary that thou shouldst be well acquainted with thyself, and that thou shouldst be diffident of thyself, as thy most dangerous enemy. With *this* conviction, thou no longer wilt rely on thyself, in the concern of salvation; thou wilt become humble and vigilant; thou wilt entirely rest on me, thou wilt invoke me, and I will save thee.

The knowledge of thyself consists chiefly in the knowledge of thy heart. It is not the ignorance or the darkness of thy mind, but the corruption of thy heart or will, that constitutes thy malice. Whenever thou dost wrong, it is thy heart that is guilty, though thou seekest to throw the blame on thy want of knowing better; and this very subterfuge is one of the strongest proofs of thy pride, and of thy want of rectitude of heart. For most of the errors of

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of thy mind originate in thy will; and the mind would ſtray leſs, or its ſtrayings would be harmleſs, if the will did not cauſe and engage it to ſtray. Attend to what man was in his original ſtate, and view the progreſs of his degradation and depravity.

I formed him upright, regular, and orderly; inclined to virtue, he felt no reluctance to practiſe it; and having no propenſion to evil, he could not commit it, but with a determination of his will, that was perfectly free. His thoughts and affections in themſelves were bent towards his Maker; not biaſſed by his ſenſes, not ſwayed by his paſſions, he had their firſt motions under abſolute command, and no external object had any power over him, independently of his full conſent. Such was his original rectitude. The lights of his reaſon, kept pace with the uprightneſs of his heart; he had a clear, diſtinct, and ſure knowledge of all thoſe truths which it concerned him to be acquainted with.

Sin has occaſioned the greateſt diſorder in his nature. It has darkened his underſtanding, and bent his will towards evil, and therefore has deſtroyed the equilibrium of his liberty. It has ſubjected him to his ſenſes, whoſe rebellion he cannot help experiencing, and whoſe impreſſions are ſo ſtrong, that he finds it moſt difficult to reſiſt them. It has kindled in him the

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the fire of concupiſcence, the parent of the paſſions, and inſtead of endeavouring to quench it, he is ſecretly impelled to preſerve and increaſe it. Above all, it has inſpired him with a deteſtable pride, which makes all yoke and dependance odious, and renders him averſe from every law whoſe injunctions or prohibitions conſtrain his liberty; this diſpoſes him to a diſobedience to his Maker, and inclines him to think that the ſtrict duties preſcribed to him are unjuſt. It has alſo inſpired him with an unbridled ſelf-love, which makes him refer all to himſelf, to concentrate all in himſelf, and to love nothing but himſelf, ſo as to erect himſelf, as it were, into a divinity, by aſſuming the rights of it, in contempt of the ſovereign love which he owes to God. This is the general diſorder of human nature, ſince the admiſſion of ſin into the world; a diſorder to which man has no remedy to apply; a diſorder which man can hardly diſcern, and which cannot be well underſtood, nor fully repaired but by my grace. However, this diſorder, as long as it exiſts in ſentiment only, and the will does not reſt in it, is not properly a ſin; it is the effect of ſin, but has not the malice of it.

Thou mayeſt obſerve in children, the firſt ſeeds of the corruption of the human heart. They are tied down to their ſenſes, and to ſenſible objects, in a total incapacity of riſing above

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above matter; of themſelves they think not of God; and becauſe they have hardly any idea, any view that is ſpiritual, and becauſe they have no facility, no inducement to reflect on ſuch objects, without the help of education, they would long remain in a mere animal ſtate. Thou mayeſt obſerve, that they naturally abhor all ſerious inſtruction, all kind of ſtudy and application, and that they muſt either be careſſed or puniſhed to be brought to a proper attention; that it is otherwiſe, with regard to the plays adapted to their age; to theſe they apply themſelves with ardour, they freely give their mind to them, they eaſily and quickly learn them. If they hear or ſee any thing that is bad, from the affinity it has with their nature, they preſently perceive it, and retain of it laſting impreſſions. As ſoon as they are acquainted with evil, they are prone to commit it, and like brutes follow the firſt impulſe they receive, although they ſee its turpitude, and are induced by ſhame to conceal it. In the child thou wilt find epitomized all the vices of the grown up man, except that the youth ſhews them more openly, from his want of reflection, and of the art of diſguiſing them. Then wilt thou ſee in him a domineering ſpirit, a ſpirit of jealouſy in the ſmalleſt preferences, thou wilt obſerve in him envy, anger, gluttony, and little thefts to indulge it, a diſpoſition to miſchief, and a

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ſecret pleaſure in that which befals others; diſſimulation, falſhood, wiles to deceive his play-fellows, and violence, when he thinks himſelf the ſtrongeſt. And yet his budding reaſon condemns all ſuch irregularities when he obſerves them in others. What a degree of malice in ſo tender an age!

But this is only a ſlender apprenticeſhip; as he grows up, his vices ſpread and are ſtrengthened. His firſt reflections are turned towards evil, as well as the early uſe of his free-will. He is impatient of the authority of his parents and tutors, and eagerly looks out for emancipation; which, when obtained, he gives free ſcope to the hurry of his paſſions, and tries all he can to juſtify his indulgence. Deaf to admonition, he takes offence at it when offered, and becomes more untoward. He ſoon forgets God and the duties he owes him; he reſiſts his graces, and rejects his inſpirations. He learns to ſilence the imperious voice of conſcience, he braves its threats and ſtifles its remorſes. He conceives a ſecret ſpite againſt religion, as impoſing on man a tyrannical yoke. His whole application is to foment and ſatisfy his unruly deſires, and to inflame his paſſions by means of lewd converſation, bad books, plays, and criminal connexions. His licenciouſneſs, which he warmly wiſhes to juſtify, ſoon leads him into the road of impiety. He begins to reaſon upon, and

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and to form doubts on matters of Faith, and gradually alſo on the firſt principles and the grounds of the law of nature. He links in friendſhip with profeſſed unbelievers, whom he liſtens to as his teachers; he admires their productions, and greedily ſucks in their poiſon; and thus diſpoſed, their ſophiſms ſeem to him demonſtrations, and their ſacrilegious and blaſphemous deriſions, wrapt up in the language of pleaſantry, are deemed ſo many ſallies of wit. If all young people do not go to theſe lengths, they are all more or leſs inclined ſo to do, and the firſt ſtep towards iniquity, would drive them into the precipice, if an attentive Providence did not prevent their ruin.

As man advances in years, the malignity of his heart becomes more reflexed and radicated. The high glow of his paſſions is abated; but the habit ſtill ſubſiſts, and is a ſecond nature. He ſins more coolly; he ſees the conſequence of his ſin, and yet calmly braves them. He avoids and rejects every ſalutary thought with greater deliberation; enſlaved by the world, he is totally abſorbed in projects of wealth and preferment, and ſtops at no means that may procure ſucceſs. What effect can religion have on a heart thus enthralled?

Thou mayeſt eaſily judge what a covetous man muſt think of the goſpel, that denounces woe to the rich, and commands a detachment from all earthly

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earthly things; and what opinion an ambitious man muſt form of a law that formally pronounces that, *that which is high to men, is an abomination before God* *. How can either of them adore, cordially love, or propoſe to themſelves as a pattern, a God, by choice poor and abject; a God, who from his birth in the manger to his death on the croſs, announces a moſt characteriſtic contempt of all that the world eſteems? They not only refuſe to adore me, they alſo reject me, becauſe they know that I reprobate them. Some of them through human reſpect, and through a motive of decency, wear ſome exterior marks of religion, but tranſgreſs in eſſentials, and abhor both my example and doctrine. Others, again, openly declare againſt it, but through a refined malice and hypocriſy, they conceal the real cauſe of their hatred againſt me. They attack the proofs of my revelation as either falſe, dubious, or inconcluſive; whilſt at the ſame time they are invincibly perſuaded of the truth, the certainty, and the force of them. They point out the myſteries as ſo many abſurdities, becauſe incomprehenſible; though they well know that myſteries are the conſequence of the nature, and of the infinite perfections in the Deity;

* Luke, xvi. 15.

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and that they would no longer be an object of faith, and that the belief of them would no longer be an homage of the mind, if, like natural truths, they could be demonstrated. But the truth is, unwilling as they may be to acknowledge it, it is my morality that shocks them, for they would not hesitate to believe, if my doctrine indulged them in the gratification of their passions.

And, yet, here also their reason condemns the depravity of their heart; for they well know that my doctrine would not be heavenly, that it would not be consonant to the nature, the dignity, and to the destination of man, nor yet compatible with the duties and the first laws of society, if it were such as they wish it to be, and no ways restrained them. But such is their corruption, that they readily pass over these palpable contradictions, which they fancy they can remove by shunning the thought of them; and by dint of perverseness they become totally blind.

The completion of wickedness is to be seen in the last stage of life, when sensible objects lose all their charms, and the battered constitution can no longer take to them; though in many the will is still lively, whilst nature is exhausted. They are perverse, because they have been so, and obstinately persist in remaining

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ing ſo. If they no longer can enjoy pleaſure, with complacency they recall former times, and become more guilty by deſires than they had been by action. Even on the brink of the grave their pride and covetouſneſs torment them more than ever, and they then only ceaſe to crave, when they ceaſe to live. Should the approach of their laſt hour awake in them the thought of eternity, and of the fate that awaits them, they ſtrive to repel all ſuch gloomy ideas, and ſtruggle againſt the terrors of an alarmed conſcience. They harden and reſolve to die impenitent, and run the riſk of an unhappy eternity.

Nevertheleſs their reaſon was never more ſound nor more clear ſighted. Their paſſions are deadened, and their imagination is frozen. The world no longer charms them, as they no longer charm the world, the vanity of whoſe illuſions, prejudices and maxims they are experimentally acquainted with. What, therefore, detains them in their crime and impiety? What hinders them from liſtening to the voice of religion, that ſtill calls upon them to deplore what is paſt, and provide for futurity? What hinders them? The profound and conſummate malice of their hearts. They are ſtopped by pride. They think they would hurt their reputation of being men of fortitude, if it could

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be ſaid of them that they had acknowledged the truth, and had been converted. They brave death and its dreadful conſequences; they deem it a merit and a point of honour to ſtand up againſt God, to adhere to the laſt to their principles, and to crown a licentious life with an impious death.

Do not ſay that this picture does not delineate thee. Thou haſt not ſtudied thy heart, if thou thinkeſt thyſelf incapable of the ſame kind of exceſſes. Perhaps thou haſt not fallen into them, but it is not thy natural goodneſs that has preſerved thee from them. Thou oweſt every thing to my grace, even thy cooperation and the good uſe thou haſt made of thy free will. Acknowledge that thou haſt had, and that thou ſtill haſt in thy nature a violent propenſity to ſin; bring to mind that thy paſſions have ſtrongly ſolicited thee, and that more than once thou haſt liſtened to them, or haſt been on the point of yielding to them. This ſufficiently ſhews thy corruption; of thyſelf thou never couldſt have preſerved thyſelf from, or overcome their tyranny; but from one abyſs to another they would have driven thee into the bottom of the precipice. Be humble; and always be mindful that whatever ſin one man commits, every other man may be guilty of, ſhould God leave him to his own frailty.

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frailty. Be mindful alſo, that without a very ſpecial grace, there is no one that has not deſerved ſome time or other during his life to have been abandoned by God, had he only conſidered the rules of his juſtice. Tremble, therefore, and tremble to the very laſt at the thought of the malice of thy heart; which of itſelf only produces evil thoughts and deſires, being all pride and corruption.

O my only Maſter, I return thee thanks for having enlightened me in this capital concern, which I had never ſufficiently reflected upon, and did not know myſelf. I had the miſtaken and even the deteſtable preſumption to think myſelf good, at leaſt in compariſon of others; I was in an error, and upon that account I deſerved to have been left a prey to the full perverſeneſs of my heart. Penetrated with a deep ſenſe of my evils, I throw myſelf into thy hands, O heavenly phyſician, that thou mayeſt heal both thoſe of my nature and thoſe of my will. I cannot know either that I am ſick, or to what degree I am ſick, unleſs thou teacheſt me; I cannot ſeek for a remedy, unleſs thou inviteſt me; I cannot make uſe of it, unleſs thou preventeſt and ſecondeſt me. What then am I? a leper all over ſores, and at the ſame time a helpleſs paralytic, incapable of the leaſt motion towards a cure; even incapable of a deſire

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desire of it. O Lord, I owe all to thy mercy; the pardon of the sins I have committed, as well as the exemption from those which I might have committed. Grant that in future I may be diffident of myself, and that I may find salvation in the practice of humility, and in my confidence in thee. *Amen.*

FOURTH

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FOURTH LESSON.

FROM THE HEART COME FORTH EVIL THOUGHTS.

THE leſſon which I have begun to give thee on the corruption of thy heart, is not exhauſted. The thoughts which withdraw us from good, are as bad as thoſe which incline us to evil. Liſten therefore anew, and whether thou be godly or ſinful, thou canſt not fail becoming acquainted with thyſelf.

The repugnance which man experiences to good, correſponds to his proneneſs to evil; and both the one and the other ſpring from original ſin; but this repugnance is in every one great in proportion, as it is yielded to, inſtead of being oppoſed. I here ſpeak to thee of the ſupernatural good, the practice of which is neceſſary to attain thy laſt end; and it is not in others, but it is in thyſelf that I mean to ſhew thee how repugnant thou art to all the duties which my goſpel preſcribes. Immenſe would be the detail of thoſe virtues I recommend; I ſingle out a few, which include the others. Thou haſt a repugnance to the love of God, and to the love of thy neighbour; thou haſt a repugnance to follow the motions of grace, and to withdraw thyſelf from ſenſible things, in order to raiſe thyſelf to things that are

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are ſpiritual; thou haſt a repugnance to ſelf-denial, to every kind of croſſes and trials, by which I ſanctify the chriſtian. Are there not here plenty of repugnances? Liſten, know thyſelf, and become humble.

Thou haſt a repugnance to love God. Dreadful to ſay, and to think! He is thy ſovereign good, thy only good; he is infinitely amiable; he has loaded thee with bleſſings; he promiſes thee an eternal happineſs, and thou canſt not be happy but through him. And yet, when thou art to love him any other way than by barren ſentiments and words; when thou art to come to deeds, and prove to him the preference thou giveſt him over every thing elſe; when for the love of him thou art to renounce ſomething that is dear to thee; when thou art to ſubmit thyſelf to his bleſſed will in things that are contrary to thine; when thou art to uſe violence to thyſelf in order to pleaſe him; in ſhort, when thou art to diſcharge ſome painful duty which he demands of thee, not only doſt thou feel it troubleſome to obey, but thou even reſiſteſt him, and that without ſcruple, where thou doſt not apprehend that thy ſalvation is at ſtake. In all that does not appear to be intirely criminal, thou prefereſt, without heſitation, thy own will to God's will and pleaſure; and thou haſt ſtill to learn how thou ſhouldſt ſhew thy love for him in little things.

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things. Thou art for loving him but to a certain degree, beyond which, thou conſidereſt thy affections to be at thy own diſpoſal. Thou fancyeſt, that he demands too much, when he aſks thy whole heart; and though thou dareſt not ſay it, thou thinkeſt in thy heart, that the firſt, the greateſt, the moſt indiſpenſible of precepts taken in its full extent, is too ſevere. Thou wiſheſt to confine thyſelf to what is of ſtrict obligation; and becauſe this obligation, cannot well be determined, thou art ever induſtrious to divert thy thoughts from conſidering whether thou loveſt God as much as it is thy duty to do, and as much as he requires thee to love him.

From whence proceeds this repugnance to the moſt juſt, the moſt holy, the moſt engaging, and the ſweeteſt of all duties? It ariſes from an inordinate love of thyſelf, from a love that is directly oppoſite to that which thou oweſt to God; from a love that induces thee to conſult in all things thy own intereſt, to the prejudice of the intereſt of thy Maker. As if thou couldſt have any real intereſt that is different from his; and as if, were ſuch a thing poſſible, thou wouldſt not be obliged to ſacrifice thy intereſts to his. Do'ſt thou not ſee at preſent, how great the malice is of thy ſelf-love; how unjuſt, how blind it is, and how far it ſeduces thee? know that it is thy enemy, becauſe it is

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God's enemy; and that thou really hateſt thyſelf, and hurteſt thyſelf exceedingly in loving thyſelf thus; becauſe thou weakeneſt, thou tendeſt to deſtroy in thee the love of God. Wilt thou queſtion in future, that as long as ſelf-love reigns in thy ſoul, it baniſhes from it, along with the love of God, the proper love which thou oweſt to thyſelf? Since thou prejudiceſt thyſelf in proportion as thou withdraweſt thyſelf from thy ſovereign good, and loveſt thyſelf truly, but in proportion as thou loveſt God; and therefore to labour to eſtabliſh in thee the divine love, on the ruins of ſelf-love, is, in fact, to labour to render thyſelf happy, even upon earth, by eſtabliſhing in thy heart order and peace.

I now aſk thee, do'ſt thou not feel the ſtrongeſt and keeneſt inclination to flatter thy ſelf-love? Do'ſt thou not follow that inclination? Do'ſt thou not approve it? Do'ſt thou not find that morality too ſevere, that commands thee entirely to root it up? Do'ſt thou not endeavour to explain and mitigate it? Acknowledget herefore, that thy repugnance to love God, equals thy repugnance to combat ſelf-love; acknowledge that thou art more or leſs culpable, according to the importance of the objects in which thou gratifyeſt ſelf-love, to the prejudice of the love of God; and there will be always ſomething reprehenſible in thee, until

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until thou haſt determined to admit no affection in thy heart, that has not God for principle, motive, and end: and conſequently thou muſt acknowledge that thou haſt a repugnance to love thyſelf, with the only love that is approved by thy reaſon, and is conſecrated by religion.

Thou haſt no leſs a repugnance to the love of thy neighbour, whom thou art commanded to love as thyſelf. Canſt thou doubt it, if thou examineſt thy ſentiments and behaviour towards him? Do'ſt thou rejoice at his good, as thou do'ſt at thy own? Art thou grieved at his evil, as thou wouldſt at thine? Do'ſt thou try to oblige him? Art thou attentive, as much as in thee lies, to avert and remove what might be hurtful to him? In ſhort, is his welfare as dear to thee as thy own? Haſt thou in his regard, thoſe ſentiments of eſteem, regard, and condeſcenſion which thou wiſheſt him to have for thee? Do'ſt thou bear with his faults, as thou wouldſt have him bear with thine? Do'ſt thou excuſe his foibles, do'ſt thou palliate and bury them in ſilence, as thou expecteſt he would bury thine? Art thou diſpoſed to pardon his wrongs, as thou wiſheſt him to pardon thine? Finally, in thy dealings with him, do'ſt thou follow the ſame rules, which thou thinkeſt juſt that he, on his part, ſhould follow? On the contrary, do'ſt not thou experience on a thouſand occaſions the greateſt reluctance

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reluctance to practiſe thoſe duties? Art thou not ſtrongly ſolicitated to violate them, and muſt thou not uſe thy utmoſt efforts in order to obſerve them?

I ſuppoſe thee to be attentive to the obſervance of them, and that thou art delicately conſcientious on this head. But I aſk if the charity towards thy neighbour be not moſt painful to thee, and that which tries thy virtue the moſt? If thou art candid, thou wilt not deny it. Thou wilt confeſs that thy heart is full of a lurking malignity againſt him; that thou art liable to antipathies and averſions, which often thou canſt not account for, nor yet eaſily overcome; that there are conſtantly ariſing in thy mind, cenſorious thoughts, unfavourable ſuſpicions, and raſh judgments; that thou heighteneſt his faults, perverteſt his intentions, and condemneſt his words and actions; that thou art naturally jealous of his reputation and ſucceſs; that thou feeleſt unwilling to acknowledge his merit, and do juſtice to his worth; that on every occaſion thou droppeſt back-biting, mocking, and contemptible expreſſions; that thoſe who live with you have much to ſuffer from thee, whilſt thou will put up with nothing from them; that thou haſt the greateſt ſenſibility and delicacy in all that concerns thee, and that thou fancyeſt that others are at all times wanting to thee, whilſt thou

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thou hardly fancyeſt that thou oweſt any thing to others. Are not theſe, and a great many other things, the ordinary ſubject of thy inward conflicts, of thy faults, of the reproaches of thy conſcience, and of thy accuſations? Thy commerce with thy neighbour, which in my deſigns was to contribute to the happineſs of thy life, has it not become to thee a ſource of little hatreds and broils, of pain and of torment?

What is the cauſe of this? It is thy ſelf-love that is excluſive, that will have all to itſelf, and that never gives, but with a view of a more ample return; that makes thee ſee in thy neighbour an enemy who is for diſputing with thee, and robbing thee of what thou takeſt to be thy property. At bottom thou only eſteemeſt thyſelf, and thou groundeſt that eſteem on the contempt of others. Thou only ſeeſt in thyſelf thy good qualities whether imaginary or real, and ſtoppeſt to conſider in others, what is bad or defective in them, undervaluing and disfiguring what good qualities they may have. Thy own intereſts wholly engroſs thee, and at beſt thou art indifferent about what intereſts thy neighbour; and even that becomes to thee odious, ſhould it ſeem to claſh with what intereſts thyſelf. Thou art always for gaining, and for thy neighbour to loſe; always for carrying it, and for thy neighbour to yield; always

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always for being right, and thy neighbour in the wrong. I appeal to thyself, are not these the dispositions of thy heart? And can there be any more malignant, more unjust, more contrary to charity.

Thou hast a repugnance to the attraction of grace, that excites thee to what is good, and from that to better, and then to what is perfect. Thou therefore hast an aversion from all these three, which thou never wouldst perform without my special assistance, that alone can overcome the opposition of thy will. Is it not this repugnance to the attraction of grace, that has caused thee so long to defer, or still causes thee to defer thy conversion? Does it not render thee habitually deaf and restiff to so many inspirations? Does it not lead thee to complain, and to fancy that what I exact of those who give themselves to me, contains too much perfection, and that I do not cease to give them fresh means for advancement, without ever allowing them to grant any thing to nature? Is it not this repugnance that retains thee in the state of carelessness and tepidity, that in order to shun my call, which thou findest to be troublesome to thee, thou droppest recollection and prayer, and entereſt into dissipation? Such is thy disposition: or, if thou art become docile to my grace, thou must acknowledge that thou hast long opposed it; thou must acknowledge

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knowledge that even now, when my grace is pure, dry, and wholly ſpiritual, and not accompanied with a certain ſweetneſs that wins thy conſent, thou feeleſt great reluctance to grant it. I act in this manner to inſtruct my children, that they have no reaſon to glory in any of their works; that it is not their will that produces them; and that without me, they neither could produce, nor have the will of producing them. So that the whole belongs to me, the beginning, the continuation, and the completion of every work. To me therefore all thanks are due; they therefore ſhould be at all times as grateful as they are faithful.

Thou haſt a repugnance to detach thyſelf from ſenſible objects, in order to raiſe thyſelf to things ſpiritual; becauſe in devotion, thou art always more or leſs conſulting thyſelf; thou art greedy of comforts and conſolations which feed thy ſelf-love; thou dreadeſt the ſtate of naked and pure faith, in which I am ſerved for my own ſake only; in which I am loved without any reference to my gifts; in which the ſoul ſupporteſt itſelf, by the ſole conſideration of my good will and pleaſure. This ſtate is undoubtedly the moſt perfect; it belongs only to thoſe who are advanced; the other is for beginners; but in this requeſt, thou wiſheſt to be treated like thoſe who begin to ſerve me; thou wiſheſt to be always enjoying, and feeding upon

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upon milk and honey. Thou art impatient, thou art ſad, thou art diſconſolate, thou threateneſt to quit prayer, and in fact thou quitteſt it, when I reduce thy whole nouriſhment to the bread of the ſtrong; as if in prayer thou wert not to conſider what is pleaſing to me, but what ſatisfies thyſelf; or as if what humours thy ſelf-love, were not prejudicial to thee. But thou chooſeſt rather to advance leſs, than to experience an apparent rigour and derelic-tion, which would cruſh thy perverſe nature. This is what has occaſioned many to abandon the interiour path, in which at firſt they had walked with fervour, and what has ſhut the entrance of it to many others who had been called to it.

Thou haſt a repugnance to ſelf-denial. This denial in itſelf ſo neceſſary, whoſe fruits are ſo comfortable, whoſe rewards are ſo great, is the ſtumbling-block of my goſpel, and repreſents as odious the mortification of the heart even in the eyes of thoſe, who in other reſpects are piouſly inclined. They will watch, faſt, and pray; they will undertake auſterities; they will ſpend whole days in churches; but to curb their humour, to ſtifle their ſenſibility, to be patient in contradiction, to give up their own opinion, and die to their own will, is what they refuſe to do, and what appears to them not only difficult, but even impoſſible. Should a director

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a director undertake to lead them into that path, and exact of them the practice of that sort of abnegation, how cautiously soever he enters upon the task, they argue, they oppose, and they quit him. As long as he confines them to virtues in general, they relish and approve his morality; but the moment he comes to a personal application, and touches upon some certain darling defects, they are shocked and disgusted, and look out for another who will be more indulgent to their vitiated nature, which is unwilling to consent to give all up to grace. Attentively reflect on the share thou hast in this; and be assured that there is nothing more pleasing to me, whilst, at the same time, there is nothing more rare than this perfect self abnegation.

Finally, thou hast a repugnance to every kind of trials and crosses by which I sanctify the christian. Thou dreadest and flyest from them, and complainest of my providence for sending them, instead of considering them as special favours, and accepting and embracing them as means of resemblance and conformity to me, and as the surest way that leads to eternal glory. Those crosses are numberless, and human life is strewed with them; nothing is more important than to make a good use of them; and as they are inevitable, thou shouldst resolve to bear them cheerfully for the love of me.

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me. Haſt thou hitherto done ſo? thou knoweſt the contrary. Thy nature therefore is repugnant to what my goſpel points out as moſt neceſſary and perfect. Worldly loſſes detach thee from the love of earthly poſſeſſions; corporal ſufferings expiate the failings of which thy ſlothfulneſs and ſenſuality have made thee guilty; contempt, calumny, and ignominy bring down thy pride. Thou canſt not be ignorant of the advantage of all ſuch trials. If thou wert truly chriſtian, thou wouldſt be perſuaded that I diſtribute them in my mercy; and inſtead of rebelling againſt me, thou wouldſt bleſs the hand that ſcourges thy vitiated and haughty nature.

Judge now if there be one ſingle point in my morality, that does not find in thee an inſurmountable obſtacle to every thing beſides my grace; judge if thou ſhouldſt not conceive a horror of thyſelf, as an enemy to every chriſtian virtue; judge if it be not with reaſon that I have commanded thee to hate, and to wage war with thyſelf; judge if thou haſt not as great a motive for humiliation from thy repugnance to good, as from thy propenſity to evil.

Thou openeſt my eyes, O my Saviour, and thou forceſt me to own, that I have nothing in me that is good. I ſee that all the hardſhips and difficulties which I experience in thy ſervice, ariſe from myſelf, from my pride, my ſelf-love,

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ſelf-love, from my intereſted views, and from my averſion to every thing that curbs or reſtrains me. I ſee that thy holy law, though moſt juſt, reaſonable, and ſweet in itſelf, is diſpleaſing to me, it makes me rebel, it appears hard and impracticable, becauſe I love nothing that is good, nothing that can efficaciouſly remedy the maladies of my ſoul. What I now beg of thee to grant, is, in the firſt place, that I may hate whatever is in me that thou doſt hate, that which ſin has occaſioned, and that which through my fault I have added; all thoughts, ſentiments, diſpoſitions, and habits, that withdraw me from thee, from thy doctrine and example. Grant me in the next place to combat, with all my ſtrength, or rather with all the power of thy grace, all thoſe unhappy reluctances, to root them out from my heart, and never to ceaſe, until the practice of thy law becomes my delight. Finally, grant me to perſevere in this warfare until death; never permit me to relent; help me to attain to the perfection of my love for thee, by the perfection of my ſelf denial. *Amen.*

FIFTH

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FIFTH LESSON.

THE WORLD EXCLUDED FROM THE PRAYER OF JESUS CHRIST.

I AM the chief enemy whom it behoves me to be acquainted with, for my other enemies cannot hurt me without my concurrence. But I am not my only enemy, there are two more, the world and the devil; and to guard againſt their wiles, I ought to be hardly leſs acquainted with them, than myſelf. Jeſus Chriſt teaches me in one word what I am to think of the world, when in his laſt prayer, before he delivered himſelf up for us, he ſays to his Father, *I pray not for the world, but for them whom thou haſt given me* *. Theſe words are the moſt dreadful curſe, which he has pronounced againſt the world; becauſe by excluding it from his prayer, and ſeparating it from thoſe whom his Father has given him, and who ſhall not periſh, he thereby formally declares, that the world is reprobated, and that thoſe who compoſe it, unleſs they quit it before death, ſhall be eternally loſt.

My ſoul, doſt thou well comprehend this leſſon? it is enough to make thee tremble. Art thou of the world, or art thou not? that is, art thou

* Joan. xvii. 9.

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thou attached to it in heart and affection, or no? A queſtion deciſive of thy eternity; which in order to ſolve ſolidly and to advantage, thou muſt firſt examine to the bottom what the world is, and then ſee if thou belong to it; that thou mayeſt take efficacious meaſures to preſerve thyſelf from it, ſhouldſt thou not be a component part of it; or, to ſeparate from it, ſhouldſt thou be.

What is the world? To me who am a chriſtian, and a child of the church, idolaters, heretics, and unbelievers are not thoſe whom I have much to fear from; they are, indeed, included in the meaning of our Lord, but with the leaſt fear of God, they expoſe me to no danger, as I am ſufficiently inſtructed that I am not to commune in ſentiment either with heathens and the enemies of the church; and that, as to thoſe, who are by principle irreligious and immoral, it is my duty to abhor their commerce, language, and writings. The world which is truly formidable to me, and which I cannot too carefully guard againſt, is that which profeſſing chriſtianity and an adherence to the church, which reſpecting to a certain degree both morals and faith, is ſtill ſurely in oppoſition to Jeſus Chriſt and his goſpel, and poſſeſſes a ſpirit very contrary to his. This is the world which I muſt moſt ſtudiouſly ſhun; which is ſpread throughout the ſociety of the faithful; which

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which even forms the greateſt number, and which cannot very accurately be defined.

The partiſans of this world retain ſome appearances of religion, and are not entirely devoid of it in their interiour; but they pretend to ſoften the ſeverity of it; they try to reconcile it with their inclinations, and form to themſelves a ſyſtem, accomodated to their nature. They do not renounce their faith, but along with their faith, which is always prejudiced, they liſten to a way of reaſoning which is purely human; to a way of reaſoning which is vitiated by the ſenſes and the prejudices of the fleſh; their rule of conduct is not entirely grounded on the eternal truths; but is tempered, or rather altered, by a falſe wiſdom, that proceeds from the animal man. They do not directly attack the chriſtian morality; but under pretence of explaining it, they mitigate it ſo as to disfigure it, with the view of reconciling it to their paſſions; and without being abſolutely willing to approve of the exceſſes of theſe paſſions, they are by no means of opinion that they ought to grant them nothing: uſing all their might to juſtify the indulging of them, as long as the indulgence is confined to certain bounds.

Thus in point of morals, they condemn obſcene books, and are far from authoriſing the reading of them; but they praiſe and approve of

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of the perusal of romances and poetry where passion is delicately expressed, and voluptuousness so concealed, as not to offend their modesty. They condemn plays that are openly indecent and licentious; but they attend, and recommend to others, as an innocent pastime, even as a school of instruction, those plays whether serious or comick, in which on the one hand ambition, love, revenge, and the other tragical passions act the greatest part; in which on the other hand, the laws of conjugal fidelity are ridiculed; in which honesty, uprightness, and simplicity are made dupes to craft and imposture; in a word, in which vice artfully disguised triumphs over virtue, which always is represented as attended with some defects. The same is to be said of feasting, gaming, of balls and assemblies, and of all other worldly meetings. Those I here speak of, disapprove indeed of what upon those occasions is openly disorderly, such as dissolute and riotous feasting, deep and excessive gaming, unbecoming expressions in conversation, and too loose a behaviour at their balls: but such things excepted, they pass over all the rest. They see nothing reprehensible in what flatters sensuality, encourages idleness, brings on dissipation, and insensibly perverts the morals.

A worldling is he, who suffering himself to be seduced by the deceitful appearances of sensible

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ſible objects, ſeeks in them his happineſs, or at leaſt his eaſe and comfort; it is he who is paſſionately fond of riches, honours, and pleaſures, and is not nice in his choice of the means to procure them; it is he who without totally neglecting his duties, ſtill wiſhes to accommodate the diſcharge of them to a free and unconſtrained way of life; who does not entirely renounce his ſalvation, but is not ſeriouſly employed about it; who is far from conſidering it as his main concern, and fancies it much more eaſy, than in fact it is. Are ſuch chriſtians very rare? In the world there is nothing ſo common. Are they diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt? Can he acknowledge them for his own? He cannot, for they neither follow his doctrine nor example. Are they in danger of being loſt? Yes, in evident danger, and ſo much the more ſo, the leſs they perceive it, and the leſs they diſcover in their conduct, that excites in them any conſiderable remorſe. Are they dangerous? infinitely ſo; becauſe they bear the character of prudent and moderate men, remote from all ſingularity, fit for any occupation, aſſuming of piety what is proper to be aſſumed; and becauſe they are never at a loſs for plauſible and captivating reaſons to authorize their plan of life.

They are here, I think, ſufficiently delineated. It cannot therefore be difficult for any one to find

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find out whether he belongs to the world: and were we not ſtrongly bent to deceive ourſelves, we ſhould moſt readily diſcover it. I am of the world, if I eſteem, love, and ſeek the company of thoſe who are here pourtrayed; I am of the world, if I dread to oppoſe their maxims; and much more ſo, if I think them worthy of imitation; if human reſpect influences my conduct; if I covet their approbation, and dread their cenſure; if I continue to frequent their company, though my conſcience bids me ſhun them. I need only ſound the diſpoſitions of my heart, I ſhall ſoon ſee how matters ſtand in this important concern.

There are, however, various degrees by which we may belong to the world; ſome are entirely devoted to it; others waver and heſitate, and only yield to it with trembling. The firſt are deeply imbibed with its maxims; the other begin to reliſh them. Thoſe are the maſters, theſe are the ſcholars; and in this ſchool there are different claſſes, though they all liſten, learn, and form themſelves according to their age, temper, rank, and docility.

But what means muſt be uſed to guard againſt the world? or to detach one's ſelf from it? The firſt of theſe two queſtions chiefly concerns the youth of both ſexes, who, being incapable of taking care of themſelves, ſtand in need of being carefully attended to by others. Deſti-

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tute of any well grounded principle, and quite inexperienced, young people are uſhered into life, and are unacquainted with it. Every thing ſeems new to them, and the firſt ſight charms them; as yet circumſpect and timid, they are more inclined to applaud than condemn; they ſuffer themſelves to be faſhioned, and have not the courage to reſiſt the impreſſions that are given them. If brought up in piety, all they ſee and hear is ſo different from what they had learnt, that at firſt they are aſtoniſhed, and do not immediately chime in with ideas and with a language to which they are ſtrangers; their devotion is railed at; their ſimplicity is mocked, and inſenſibly their conſcience is enlarged. In the beginning they are aſhamed to ſpeak and to act as others do; they doubt and they heſitate; but becoming at length leſs ſhy, they begin to conſider the firſt leſſons they received as calculated for youthful years, and henceforward no longer in ſeaſon; they bluſh at them, and deſpiſe them; they trample them under foot, and drop them into oblivion. I but very faintly expreſs the havock and deſtruction which the firſt intercourſes with the world, occaſion in a ſoul that is raw and inexperienced.

This misfortune is almoſt unavoidable in thoſe who are left to themſelves at too early a period. It is the duty of chriſtian parents to

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ſet their children on their guard againſt this ſeduction. They ſhould not expoſe them to the world, until they are ſufficiently inſtructed and grounded in good principles. They ſhould accuſtom them to reflect on men and things; and to diſcern the good from the bad; the dangerous from the indifferent; the lawful from the unlawful. There are great precautions of prudence to be taken, concerning what ought to be ſhewn to them or concealed from them of the world, when at that age. It is not proper that they ſhould ſee all, nor yet that they ſhould be ignorant of all. To forward a youth too much, is almoſt the ſame as to ruin him; and to keep him too backward, only ſharpens his deſires, and expoſes him to the danger of launching into it unreſervedly, at his very firſt ſtarting. A juſt medium is not ſeized upon. But a prudent parent will know how to turn to the advantage of his child every unforeſeen accident, and will carefully preſerve him from thoſe in which he ſuſpects danger.

The beſt preſervative is to bend the mind of a youth to that which is ſolid in every kind, and not to cultivate too much, nor too much admire in him the frivolous talents he may have: his judgment ſhould be much exerciſed, and he ſhould be taught to refer every thing to ſome certain determined points of the goſpel-morality, which ought to be deeply implanted

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in his heart; ſuch as the ſhortneſs of life, the uncertainty of death, the conſtant revolution of the things here below; the happy or unhappy eternity that awaits us, and into which we launch at every inſtant; the extreme importance of the duties of his calling, and how he is to prepare himſelf for a proper diſcharge of them; the peace and joy of a good conſcience; the dreadful remorſes that are brought on by ſin; the difficulty, or rather the impoſſibility, of ſtopping on the brink of the precipice; the diſorder and confuſion which the paſſions occaſion; their perfidious allurements which lead always further than it was intended at firſt, and finally terminate in a ſad and uſeleſs repentance. Theſe great truths cannot be too much inculcated to children, when once they are capable of underſtanding and feeling them. They are the baſis of ſound judgment and of true wiſdom, and contain every ſafe and ſure rule for a proper conduct through life. Happy the ſoul that reliſhes them betimes, that willingly liſtens to the inſtructions that enforce them, and reads with pleaſure the books that explain them! It never will ſide with the world; and ſhould its lot be to live in it, it will baffle all its ſnares.

As to the meaſures to be taken to ſeparate from the world, after having engaged in it, I can ſee but one, which is, abſolutely to break off

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off with it, and so openly declare against it as to preclude all inducement to a return. This step requires courage, but it is indispensible; and it is not renouncing the world, to be ever desirous of holding by it in some shape or other. Either the link by which thou remainest connected with the world will soon again bring on thy former connexions, or that one link will alone be thy ruin. The world, as well as God, will have us wholly to itself; it admits of no division; if thou quittest it but by halves, it either will rail at and censure thee, or will find ways and means to regain thee, and fetter thee more closely than ever. Thus, whilst no advantage accrues to thee from the part of the world, thou hazardest every thing, by entering into a composition with it. But how am I to separate from it? Be seriously willing to save thy soul; pray God to enlighten thee; advise with a prudent director; and thou no longer will be embarrassed on that head. All the difficulties in this matter proceed from the want of determination in the will.

O my Saviour! as the world has despised, rejected, and crucified thee in thy adorable person; and as it ceases not daily to despise, reject, and crucify thee in thy faithful servants, is there need of any thing more, if I belong to thee, to engage me to detest and shun it? Do not permit me to be ranked among those for

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whom thou haſt not prayed. Preſerve me from the world, or ſnatch me out of it. I will have no ſhare with it, becauſe it has none, and cannot have any with thee. That I may conceive of its maxims that horror which they deſerve, teach me to confront them with thine; to oppoſe its darkneſs, to thy light; its cheating allurements, to thy raviſhing charms; its deceitful and tranſitory pleaſures, to thy real and everlaſting delights; thy ſolid and inward peace, to its ſuperficial joys; the repoſe that is felt in thee, to the agitation that is experienced in it. Grant that I may renounce it here below, that I may enjoy thee both in this life and in the next. *Amen.*

SIXTH

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SIXTH LESSON.

THE DEVIL OCCUPIED IN EFFECTING THE RUIN OF MANKIND.

HOLY Writ teaches me in every page, that the devil is my enemy, and that he employs againſt me all the reſources he can meet with in my vitiated nature, and in the partiſans of the world, where he reigns as ſovereign. What men will he not endeavour to ruin, ſince he uſed every effort to ruin the Apoſtles, whom the ſpecial choice of Chriſt did not ſcreen from his attacks, ſince in fact he ruined one, and cauſed another to fall, and ſtaggered, for a time, the faith of them all. Our Lord, on the eve of his paſſion addreſſing himſelf to Peter, ſaid of the twelve, *Satan has deſired to have you, that he may ſift you as wheat* *, that is, to aſſail you with the moſt violent temptations, and to detach you from me. He even will ſucceed to a certain degree. He has aſked it of God, that he may involve you in his ruin; and God has permitted him ſo to do, to cure you of your preſumption, and convince you from experience, that *you can do nothing without me. But I have prayed for thee, Peter*, for thee who wilt deny me more cowardly than the reſt; *that thy faith fail*

* Luke xxii. 31, 32.

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fail not, notwithstanding thy short defection, *and thou being once converted, confirm thy brethren.*

How many important lessons are contained in this gospel text! Satan wishes to ruin us. He can do nothing of himself; he must ask God's permission to tempt us. What he asks to an evil purpose, God permits for our advantage. Presumption infallibly makes us fall; the grace which Christ has obtained for us, supports us, or recovers us from our fall. O my divine Master! expound these lessons to my understanding, and deeply engrave them in my heart.

Satan wishes to ruin us; and why? because he is an enemy to the glory of God, and jealous of our happiness. Having been created to glorify God to a most eminent degree, dazzled with his own excellency, he rose against his Maker, aimed at being equal to him, and independent of him. Overthrown and hurled into hell by the power of the Almighty, he still retains his original pride, and breathes nothing but revenge; that is his primary object. Too weak to contend with God, he attacks us, who are destined to replace him and the rebel angels in heaven; and tries to rob us of the happiness from which he is fallen. He began to tempt mankind in our first parents, whom he

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he inevitably would have ruined, if God had not then promiſed them a liberator in the perſon of his Son.

From hence we may judge how violent he is againſt us, and how formidable an enemy he muſt be. Sometimes like a roaring lion he goes about ſeeking to devour us, and ſeizes his prey with an impetuous fury. Sometimes he borrows the hiſſing of the ſerpent, and by his inſinuating windings he ſubtilely ſlips into our ſoul the poiſon with which he kills it. He powerfully acts on our ſenſes and humours, on our imagination and paſſions; he awakens remembrances and excites thoughts, by which he troubles, darkens, and as it were intoxicates *our* reaſon; he ſolicits, he ſtaggers and puſhes our will towards evil. Our conſent is the only thing that is not at his diſpoſal; of that, we are at all times the maſters. But alas! how wavering is our liberty, and how eaſily does he gain it, whilſt he has every thing elſe in his power! He is ſo much the more to be dreaded, as he joins artifice to ſtrength; as he conceals himſelf at firſt, and ſhews not whither he would lead us; as he ſtrikes underhand blows, and only ſhews himſelf when too late to be parried. Obſerve how Eve was ſeduced, by a queſtion harmleſs in appearance; although ſhe knew the tempter, ſhe replied; from that moment

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ſhe was overcome. Through Eve he made an attack upon Adam, who though aware of the ſnare, made no greater reſiſtance. What advantage then has he not over us, ſince he conquered our firſt parents who were created in ſo perfect a ſtate!

Nevertheleſs, notwithſtanding all his malice againſt us, of himſelf he can do nothing; he muſt have God's permiſſion in order to tempt us. This is doubtleſs very humbling to a ſpirit ſo proud; but the hatred he bears us, prompts him to ſubmit to it. He receives not, however, a general permiſſion, which he may interpret and extend as he pleaſes; God circumſcribes it as he thinks proper, and rules the time, the meaſure, and circumſtances of the temptation, never ſuffering it to go beyond our ſtrength, that is, beyond that ſtrength which he at the ſame time communicates to us by his grace; ſo that he proportions the ſuccour to the violence of the attack, ſo as always to be able to come off victorious. This St. Paul expreſsly declares, and we have proofs of it in the temptation of Job, which God ſet bounds to, and which Satan was not allowed to exceed. If we have here a motive of confidence on the part of God, who never fails coming to the aſſiſtance of his creature, we have not leſs reaſon to fear from the devil, who avails himſelf of the divine permiſ-

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ſion to its full extent, and ſtill more ſo from ourſelves, as the main power of the devil comes from our want of vigilance. And this fear is ſo much the better grounded, as we never know what the iſſue of the temptation will be, nor whether God will ſuccour us efficaciouſly; though he always ſufficiently aſſiſts us: this he ſuffers us to be ignorant of, to exerciſe our faith, and conſtantly to keep us in humility and dependance. But it is very certain that whoſoever is not on his guard; who does not pray as he ought; who expoſes himſelf to danger; who preſumes on paſt victories, and makes no reſiſtance on the firſt onſet, will be overcome; nor can he impute his misfortune to God, who ſufficiently warns us to take thoſe precautions.

What Satan deſires to an evil purpoſe, God permits for our good and advantage. In fact, what is God's deſign when he ſuffers us to be tempted? It is our ſanctification; which is chiefly effected by the means of temptations. He means to make us feel our exceſſive miſery and weakneſs, and the extreme need we are in of his grace; which we cannot be well acquainted with, but in thoſe perilous occaſions. This ſentiment, which is acquired by reiterated experiences, leads us to the path of a profound humility; a virtue, which to a chriſtian is the moſt eſſential; it checks the complacencies of ſelf-love,

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ſelf-love, and gradually deſtroys them. God alſo means to animate and fortify our confidence in him; becauſe we then invoke him with greater ardour, and cry to him: *Save me, O Lord; for I periſh.* The prayer of him who is tempted comes from his heart and ſoul; it is much more lively, preſſing, and full of faith, than that which he puts up in a ſtate of tranquillity. This confidence increaſes ſtill more, when God, after having permitted a long continuance of tempeſt, unexpectedly brings on a comfortable calm; when yielding to our invocation at the height of the ſtorm, he encourages us by his preſence, ſtretches forth his hand, and withdraws us from the danger which appeared to us inevitable. He alſo means to redouble our love, of which, through our fidelity, we then give him the ſtrongeſt proofs. The efforts we muſt make to reſiſt a temptation, when violent and laſting, are not to be conceived; and nothing but an ardent love can be capable of them. This love, therefore, by exerting then all its might, expands the ſoul, aggrandizes its capacity, and whilſt it extends the ſoul, it alſo extends itſelf. God means to exerciſe our patience. The exteriour evils, ſuch as ſickneſs, and others of that kind, are much leſs efficacious to produce in us that virtue, than a laſting temptation, that weighs by far heavier on the ſoul,

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ſoul, on account of the ſin which it deteſts, and which nevertheleſs it finds itſelf inceſſantly on the point of committing. A ſtate like this, when borne with in peace, and with due ſubmiſſion to Providence, elevates the virtue of patience to a high degree of perfection. Finally, God means to increaſe both our merit and reward. Immenſe are the merits which are accumulated by an unwearied reſiſtance to temptations; and God alone can appreciate them. The ſoul that acquires them, can form no notion of them; as it often fancies to have given conſent, when it is quite the contrary, and thus becomes ſcreened from vanity, which would rob it of them.

How many reaſons are there here to engage us ſteadily to encounter thoſe temptations which it may pleaſe God to ſend us, and to which on our ſide we have given no occaſion! Ye puſillanimous ſouls, who are ſo apprehenſive of them, and who dread an interiour life, becauſe it is liable to them, be of good heart, and take courage from the conſiderations which I have here ſet before you, and bring to mind the following ſentence: *Bleſſed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he has been proved, he ſhall receive the crown of life, which God has promiſed to them that love him* *. The apoſtle St. James

* Jac. i. 12.

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St. James ſpeaks thus of every kind of trials, of which temptations are undoubtedly the greateſt.

I have alſo ſaid that preſumption infallibly makes us yield to temptation. Of this St. Peter is a ſtriking inſtance; more confident than the reſt of the apoſtles, notwithſtanding the expreſs prediction of our Lord, he boldly proteſted that he never would deny him, even though all the others did. And therefore his fall was by far more criminal; becauſe the others only fled at the ſeizure of Jeſus; whereas Peter denied him at three different times, with imprecations and oaths. Let us never, therefore, rely on our own ſtrength; for we have no ſtrength of our own. Neither ſhould we rely on a certain ardour of courage, occaſioned by a ſenſible grace; there is nothing more equivocal and deceitful. Remote from danger, we may think, or even feel ourſelves capable of braving every thing; but on the occaſion, when that ſenſible grace diſappears, we are overcome as ſoon as we are attacked. Peter depended on that grace: he loved his Maſter, and as he thought, more than the others; he was burning with zeal in his cauſe. Conſulting only that zeal, he raſhly anſwered for the diſpoſitions of his heart, with which he was unacquainted. Let us not preſume on our former victories; it was grace, not ourſelves,

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ourſelves, that gained them; and weakneſs is, at all times, our only portion. How many have yielded to temptation after a long reſiſtance? They gloried in that reſiſtance, as if it had come from themſelves; and God left them to themſelves, that they might learn from whence their former ſtrength had proceeded.

Above all, let us never expoſe ourſelves to temptation; this would be a raſhneſs which God would puniſh, as he did in Peter. Had he fled, like the reſt; had he hidden himſelf; had he not been obſtinate in following his Maſter, that he might ſee what would happen, he would not have been ſuſpected to be of his diſciples, nor in the occaſion of denying him. His motive for following Chriſt was good; the thing in itſelf was good alſo: but from the prediction of his Maſter, his only reſource was in flight. When God himſelf brings us into danger, we may be aſſured of protection; but when we throw ourſelves into it, we are not to expect any ſpecial aſſiſtance; we are then reduced to ordinary helps, which ſuffice to juſtify providence, but not to preſerve us from falling. It is thy own fault, would he ſay, thou hadſt no title to my help in a danger of thy own ſeeking, or to which thou hadſt expoſed thyſelf without my order. Nor are we to ſay: It was in a good cauſe; my intention was upright. We

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We ought moreover to have considered whether it was God's will, and whether he designed to employ us on such an occasion. The deed in itself was good and holy; but God did not choose to make use of us, and gave us no sign of it. Into how many snares do we not daily fall, through an impetuous, imprudent, and misconceived zeal!

We also expose ourselves to temptation, when we remain longer in the occasion, or return to it oftener than God requires; or neglect any necessary measure to conduct ourselves properly. This particularly regards the ministers of God in the exercise of their functions, and pious people of different sexes, who meet together for mutual edification and advancement in virtue. At no time is the devil more busy than at such meetings, nor more attentive to take advantage from them, in order to vitiate what is most holy in itself. Let us therefore be as watchful on our part; let us dread the slightest indiscretion.

Finally, the grace which Christ has obtained for us by his prayer, either supports us, or recovers us from our fall. It supports and prevents us from falling, when surprised by temptation, without giving cause for it, we humbly recur to him, and confidently implore his assistance. It recovers us from our fall, as a look from

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from our Saviour recovered the apoſtle, when God in a deſign of mercy permits us to yield, that we may thereby know our weakneſs the better, that we may become more humble and more attentive in future. Thus, let the caſe be as it will, we ought never to ſuffer our confidence to be ſhaken, nor imagine that all is loſt, becauſe we have been overcome by temptation. Then the devil tries to drive us to deſpair, as if there were no reſource left; it is one of his moſt dangerous wiles, and our pride too often makes it ſucceſsful; for deſpair is the offspring of pride, which a truly humble ſoul never is liable to.

O let us ſtrongly guard againſt all deſpondence, when we chance to be overcome. We have in God a moſt tender Father, who runs at firſt call to our aſſiſtance. We have in Jeſus Chriſt a charitable phyſician, who is always ready to dreſs and to heal our wounds. God has the power to draw good from evil; he is willing ſo to do, and will do it, if we put no obſtacle. Peter, by his fall, which had more frailty than malice, did not loſe the friendſhip of his Maſter; he even more warmly excited his goodneſs and compaſſion. Jeſus looked on him, penetrated his heart with keen repentance, and drew bitter tears from his eyes. After his reſurrection he did not diſtinguiſh him the leſs by

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by a particular apparition; he did not eſtabliſh him the leſs the head of his church, and did not withdraw from him any of the privileges which he once had promiſed him. No; our preceding failures by no means weaken God's benevolence towards us; they will not prejudice our holineſs, if we make the ſame uſe of them that Peter did; if we correſpond with the grace that calls us back; if we be humble and grateful as he was; if the forgiveneſs of our faults be an inducement to increaſe our love.

Behold, I am inſtructed, O Lord, by the lights thou haſt given me: it only remains for me to hoard them up to advantage. I muſt therefore be fully perſuaded that the devil aims at my ruin, and inceſſantly aims at it with equal malignity and fury. That, however, I am not to loſe courage in the conflict with this inviſible enemy, how crafty and violent he may be, from the conſideration that his power goes no farther than thou art pleaſed to allow; that if his intention be bad, thy intention is good, and has only in view my greater ſanctification. Grant, alſo, O my God, that I may never loſe ſight of my own weakneſs; that it may inſpire me with a diffidence of myſelf, with vigilance, prudence, and with a continual recourſe to thee, who art faithful, and who will not permit the temptation to exceed the ſtrength which I receive

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receive from thy grace; to thee who wilt powerfully support me against the assaults of my adversary, and who wilt raise me again, if I invoke thee, in case of an overthrow. Protect me, O my Saviour, in this constant warfare, which is only to end with life. Be my shield against the fiery darts of the wicked one; heal the wounds he has given me, and preserve me from being wounded again: or, shouldst thou permit me to fall again, grant that it may conduce to the welfare of my soul.

SEVENTH

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SEVENTH LESSON.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

A DOCTOR of the law having aſked our Saviour what was the great commandment; he anſwered, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole ſoul, and with thy whole mind; this is the greateſt and the firſt commandment* *. Of what law is the love of God the firſt and the greateſt commandment? Of every law of which God is the author; of the natural law; of the law of Moſes, and of the goſpel law. A commandment ſo neceſſary on the part of God, that he could not give exiſtence to rational beings, without impoſing it upon them: ſo neceſſary on our part, that without the love of God, it is abſolutely impoſſible for us either to be upright or happy. A commandment which is ſo conformable to our free and intelligent nature, that our whole underſtanding is only given us to know God; our whole will but to love him; and all our liberty is only deſigned that we ſhould, by choice, give our whole mind to the knowledge, and our whole heart to the love of him. I am therefore a monſter in the moral line, if I love not God; if I do not acknowledge this obligation; or

* Matth. xxii. 36, 37, 38.

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or if, whilſt I acknowledge it, I do not do all I can to fulfil it; I degrade myſelf; I ſwerve from my final end, as much as in me lies; I renounce my nature; I ſink beneath the brute, that is faithful to the inſtinct it has received from the Creator, whilſt I repel and oppoſe the deep-rooted inſtinct that prompts me to love God.

But why has God impoſed on me this law of love? It is becauſe he is all truth, all perfection, and all that is good. Now truth, perfection, and whatever is good, are eſſentially amiable; and on being capable of knowing them, we are obliged to love them. To aſk, therefore, on what this law is grounded, is equivalently to aſk, why God is what he is, and why I am what I am. As God is infinitely worthy of love, through the neceſſity of his being, I am every way bound to love him, through the conſtitution of mine. For God is not a truth, a perfection, a good that is purely ideal: he is a truth, that is the principal object of my reaſon; a perfection, that is the rule and the model of my conduct; a good, that is the inmoſt deſire of my heart, and the only ſource of my happineſs. If, therefore, the precept of loving God be, as it were, born with me; if it be a precept interwoven with my exiſtence; if it be a precept that conſtitutes my moral nature, did it not regard me, I ſhould ceaſe being

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being man, and ſhould be ranked among the brutes. Can we then be ſurpriſed that it ſhould be the firſt and the greateſt commandment?

As my happineſs is annexed to the obſervation of it, ſo is my unhappineſs the inevitable conſequence of the tranſgreſſion of it. Setting aſide what revelation teaches, relative to the felicity of the virtuous, and the torments of the wicked in another life: reaſon alone demonſtrates, that, conſidering the nature of God and my own, and the neceſſary relations that intervene between both, I cannot be happy but by loving him; and abſolutely muſt be unhappy by not loving him. This is a matter of experience; we need only reflect on ourſelves, and be ſincere, to be forced to acknowledge it.

It is true, that here below the happineſs of loving God is not without ſome mixture of ſufferings and temporal evils; it is not without ſome inquietude about loſing, through our own fault, ſo great a treaſure; it is true, that the deceitful hopes, the falſe pleaſures, the illuſive enjoyments of the wicked, blunt or ſuſpend in them, the ſentiment of the unhappineſs of not loving God. But it is alſo not leſs true, that in ſome the ſentiment of the happineſs, and in others the ſentiment of the unhappineſs, is habitual, and always is uppermoſt on the ſmalleſt reflection. However, whatever may be the viciſſitudes of this tranſitory life, as in the next

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the love of God will be pure, permanent, and unchangeable; the happineſs that will reſult from it will partake of the ſame qualities: in like manner, the privation of this love, being neither diverted nor deceived by the enjoyment of any other object, will make itſelf be felt in its full force, and without interruption: and ſuch will be the great and inexplicable torment of the reprobate, of which, upon earth, no juſt notion can be formed.

But what ſhould the qualities be, of the love of God? ſuch, no doubt, which God deſerves and exacts. We muſt love him *with our whole heart, with our whole ſoul, with our whole mind;* another evangeliſt adds, *with all our ſtrength**. Let us weigh well theſe expreſſions; and let us ſee if they do not exhauſt all the faculties we have of knowing and of loving. We muſt love God with a love of preference, which admits between him and every other object no ſort of compariſon. It is a neceſſary conſequence of the infinity of his being. We muſt love him without diviſion, and never ſuffer any other love to weaken, in the leaſt, our love for him. His jealouſy would be hurt, and his holineſs offended. All our thoughts and ſentiments, all our deſires and actions muſt be referred to this love, by a general or a particular intention; or at leaſt there muſt be nothing that excludes that

* Marc. xii. 33.

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that reference. For such an exclusion would render vicious, and more or less criminal before God, every free act that should be liable to it. The very words of the precept lead to that; and to give them a less extent, would be evidently to alter their meaning. We must thus love God at all times, and at every instant, when we have, and ought to have, the use of our spiritual faculties: for they are only given us for that, and that is their most essential exercise.

We are not to imagine, that in any state, either before or under the law of Moses, much less under the christian dispensation, the love which God exacts of us has been, or can be, natural; that is, that man of himself, without God's grace, can comply with the obligation of it. We cannot be ignorant, that at his first creation, through a bounty purely gratuitous, he was placed in a state above the exigence of his nature, was destined to a happiness which was no ways his due, and which of himself he was incapable of meriting; he was consequently raised to a rectitude of a superiour rank, was vested with sanctifying grace, and assisted with supernatural means, that were proportionable to his destination; and therefore was obliged to love God, with a love that surpasses his natural capacity. The Creator then has placed in his heart the germe of this love; which, as he

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he loſt it by his diſobedience, it would have been impoſſible for him ever to have recovered it, if God, in different periods, had not procured him various means ſo to do. Since the coming of Chriſt, the germe of divine love is communicated to us by baptiſm. Should ſin ſtifle it in our heart, it grows again by repentance, when we faithfully correſpond with the graces which are given to prepare us for it; for grace alone gives us, or reſtores us, to charity.

But though charity in its ſource ſolely proceeds from God, its increaſe depends on us; and as it is our duty to do what we can to diſpoſe ourſelves te receive it, when once we have received it, it is equally incumbent on us inceſſantly to preſerve and increaſe it. For the love of God is kept up and augmented by practiſing it; it is a fire that cannot ſubſiſt without fuel: but it receives freſh vigour from whatever is added to it. This fuel is prayer, the uſe of the ſacraments, ſpiritual reading, good works, the habitual diſpoſition of the ſoul, with its internal acts, our ordinary actions in general, which we can and ought to ſanctify; and, in particular, thoſe actions which are annexed to the duties of our calling.

O God, I have never underſtood, till now, the nature of thy firſt commandment; nor yet the extent of the obligations it lays me under; obligations moſt pleaſing, ſince it is love that

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commands them, and are accompliſhed by love; obligations to which my heart ought to tend with all its weight, ſince it is made to love thee; and ſince the practice of thy law is no other than the exerciſe of thy love. But, alas! ſin has placed in me a propenſity to evil, and a repugnance to do good; which render the one difficult to avoid, the other painful to practiſe. It has fortified my ſelf-love, the irreconcilable enemy to thy love; which attaches me to things ſenſible and preſent; which makes me my own centre; which engages me to refer every thing to myſelf, and vitiates the purity of thy ſervice, by the ſeeking of my own intereſt; of an irregular and miſtaken intereſt; becauſe I prefer it to, and allow it not to depend upon thine. Either I love thee not, and only obey thee through the fear of being loſt; or I ſerve thee like a hireling, with the view of reward, which I only conſider as conducive to my happineſs. I reckon; I calculate with thee; I examine where I may loſe leſs, and gain more, for myſelf; and it ſeems that I ſhould not ſerve thee, were I not forced to it, through the fear of puniſhment; or induced to it, through the hope of ſafety.

Is it then loving thee, O my God, to guide myſelf ſolely by thoſe motives? Is this the ſpirit, with which thou, who art charity, inſpireſt thy children? Would an earthly father,

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ther, would even a master be willing to be served in this manner? Does not true and perfect love banish fear? And without excluding hope, does it not elevate the soul to purer and more noble sentiments? Fear, though useful, and sometimes necessary in temptation, ought never to be my only and habitual motive; it may withdraw me from evil, but it does not bid me to do good; it may induce me to avoid unhappiness, but it cannot procure me happiness; alone it never will open to me the gates of heaven, where no one can enter but through love. Instead of widening, it contracts the soul, and inspires it only with mean sentiments, by incessantly bringing it back to *itself*; it brings on agitation, grief, and sometimes a kind of despair, from the consideration of the justice of God, of the inflexibility of his judgments, and the rigour of his vengeance: without tempering these anxieties and anguishes with the least degree of confidence in the goodness of the very best of fathers.

Hope is a great spur to virtue; it powerfully supports the soul in trial and affliction: but if not spirited by love, it does not dispel those troublesome inquietudes, those frightful doubts that torment us; nor does it render us capable of any generous effort. Contracted and bounded by interested views, it confines us within the narrow circle of what we think absolutely

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neceſſary to ſave us. It animates and ſupports us in things that are of ſtrict duty; it abandons us on the occaſions on which love alone can lift us above human weakneſs, and produce in us the ſublimeſt acts of heroic virtue. Hope is not ſufficient to juſtify the ſinner; of itſelf, it does not diſpoſe him to receive the grace of the ſacrament; there muſt be a commencement of love, howſoever theology may explain it. Fear has its advantages, I have already ſaid; here below, hope ought never to leave us, to whatſoever degree of perfection we may have attained; nor can we ſufficiently indulge and ſtrengthen it: but ſtill it is love that ſhould be the rule of a chriſtian, and the main-ſpring of his actions.

Have I hitherto been a chriſtian? I think myſelf ſuch, becauſe I dread my damnation, and intend my ſalvation; but to fear damnation, and to wiſh for ſalvation, if we ſtop there, is not to love God, but to love ourſelves; it is not to act for him, but to labour for ourſelves; it is not to be taken up with his glory, and the accompliſhment of his will, but only to *think* of our own intereſt. The primary and tranſcendant will of God is, that I ſhould love *him*; every other will which he has, terminates there; and this is exactly what I do not accompliſh, or accompliſh very imperfectly.

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And yet the whole christian religion preaches nothing but love: all that God is in himself; all that he is with relation to me; all that he promises me for eternity, are so many powerful motives to love him. Love is a homage which I owe to the infinite beauty, to the infinite perfection of his being; it is a tribute of gratitude, which I owe to his benefits; it is the only return with which I can requite his love, which has prevented me.

O my soul, reflect on the words with which thy God addresses thee by his prophet: *I have loved thee with an eternal charity* *. I stood not in need of thee for my felicity. Thou wert in the abyss of nothing, from whence I have drawn *thee* through love. Thou holdest from my love all the natural faculties with which I enriched thee. If thou lovest thyself; if thou thinkest thyself worthy of being loved, to me alone art thou indebted for it; it is a just reason for thee to determine to love thy Creator. The love thou hast for thyself would be in order, if it were a motive for thee to love me, and were subordinate to my love; it is only unjust, because it stops at thyself, without reaching me. I will not remind thee of this universe, which is thy palace, and which I have built for thee; all the creatures that are for thy use, and that only exist for thy wants or thy pleasures, invite thee

* Jer. xxxi. 3.

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thee to love me, and reproach thee with thy ingratitude when thou fixeſt on them thoſe affections which thou oweſt to their Maker and to thine. What I have done for thee in the order of nature, is invaluable, and thou doſt not love me! and thou daily abuſeſt my benefits, to offend me!

But the above is nothing, when compared to what thou oweſt me, in the order of grace; I have created thee to be eternally happy with my happineſs; to ſee and poſſeſs me; to be inſeparably united with me, and to be plunged for ever in a torrent of ineffable delights. This is thy end. I have endowed thee with ſupernatural gifts, ſuitable to ſo high a deſtination. I only required thy love and thy obedience, in order to ſecure the poſſeſſion of that immenſe benefit. Thou haſt rebelled againſt me, in the perſon of thy firſt parents; and thou haſt loſt all, without any remedy on thy part. I have returned to thee all again to a greater advantage, by giving thee in my Son a Redeemer, who has given himſelf up for thee, through an incomprehenſible love; who made himſelf man, to reconcile thee to me by his death; who by his ſacrifice, and the effuſions of his blood, has merited for thee the neceſſary graces and helps, to enable thee to attain thy laſt end; who in quality of pontiff and mediator, ceaſes not to intercede for thee, and to ſolicit thy pardon as often

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often as thou rendereſt thyſelf guilty, with an aſſurance of obtaining it, if thou doſt not obſtinately refuſe it; who through an admirable invention of his love, nouriſhes thee with his own fleſh and blood, and transforms himſelf, as it were, into thee, or rather transforms thee into himſelf. For ſo many ſignal favours, and for the eternal glory and happineſs to which I deſign to raiſe thee, what do I require of thee? That thou wouldſt love thy Maker, thy Benefactor, thy Saviour, and thy Rewarder. And thou findeſt this condition to be too ſevere! This commandment ſeems to thee too difficult! Perhaps thou thinkeſt it unjuſt! O my God, what ſhall I ſay? Silence, ſhame, confuſion, repentance, proteſtation of loving thee in future with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my ſoul, with all my ſtrength.

Imprint on me, O my divine Maſter, this great and primary leſſon. Engrave it with burning flames, that it may never be effaced. My mind is fully convinced of it; but it is my ungrateful, my obdurate and inſenſible heart, that muſt be moved. It is not an inconceivable myſtery that it ſhould not reliſh ſuch a leſſon, that it ſhould have a kind of an averſion to it, and that it ſhould conſtantly refuſe to put it in practice? However inexpreſſible, therefore, muſt be its perverſity and corruption! O take from me this heart of ſtone, and give me a heart of

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fleſh. Alas! it is only of ſtone towards God; but every other way, too carnal and too ſenſible to creatures. It loves; for what heart does not love? but it only loves itſelf, with an unjuſt and inordinate love. If it loved thee above all things, as it ought, by that alone it would properly and perfectly love; as it then would love its ſovereign and only good. If the ſource of its happineſs be not in my heart, but in thee, it therefore ſhould quit itſelf, and conſtantly tend towards thee; and ſeek its repoſe but in thee alone. To love, is to live for, and in the object that is loved: may I, therefore, from this moment, O my God, live for thee and in thee.

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EIGHTH LESSON.

THE LOVE OF GOD, ONCE MORE.

As the obligation of loving God is the moſt eſſential and the moſt indiſpenſable duty of a chriſtian; a duty from which all other duties take their riſe, and to which they muſt all return; there is nothing more important than to be aſſured as much as he can be, that he fulfils it; at leaſt, in ſuch a manner, as not to endanger his ſalvation. Of this, however, we cannot have a complete certainty: and therefore we muſt be ſatisfied with a moral aſſurance. Sad *is this* condition of man, by which he is unable to be ſure and certain that he fully diſcharges the very firſt of his duties; and that on which depends his eternal felicity. Saint Auſtin ſaid to God, *My conſcience gives me a ſure teſtimony that I love thee.* Other ſaints, both before and after him, might have ſaid as much; but without an expreſs revelation, neither he nor the others had a certain knowledge that their love was ſuch as to deſerve heaven. How comes this? becauſe, in fact, it is impoſſible to come to a juſt determination on that head. We, indeed, know, that the leaſt degree of pure charity is ſufficient to ſave us; but how can we be ſure that we have pure charity, even in its

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loweſt degree? Does not our ſelf-love deceive us? and is even our confidence, in this point, that ſort of witneſs, that is not liable to miſtake? Supernatural charity, in its ſource, comes from God; he infuſes it into the heart, and he alone has a juſt knowledge of what he does.

If, as St. Bernard decides it, the meaſure of loving God be to love him without meaſure; who will flatter himſelf that he loves in this manner? Not, ſurely, the ſaints; on the contrary, they continually reproach themſelves for not loving enough. They have no deſire more ardent, or more conſiſtent, than to love ſtill more; and that is the beſt proof that they love God as they ought; but it is no proof to them; and they are not allowed to reſt on it with reflection; it is a proof only to God, who fathoms, and beholds with complacency, their inward diſpoſitions, and is pleaſed with their peaceful inquietude on that head. For it is to be obſerved, that when they reproach themſelves in this manner, they are not diſturbed: the ſtate of uncertainty they are in proceeds not from reflection, but only from inſtinct and ſentiment: beſides, in the eſtimation of their love, it is not their own intereſt, but the intereſt of God they conſider. They are therefore perfectly tranquil on their lot. But reflecting on what God is in himſelf, on what he deſires, and what he has done for them, they keenly feel the impoſſibility they

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they are in, of worthily requiting him by their love; this excites in them continual efforts to redouble it; it inceſſantly conſumes them by repeated deſires, and even cauſes in them an inexpreſſible pain at not being able to arrive at the term of their wiſhes: and that is the delicious torment of divine love; a torment which is given but to few to experience, becauſe there are but few who take proper pains to love God with their whole heart.

Let us dive farther into the thought of St. Bernard; and the better to ſee the truth of it, let us conſider the energy of the words of the precept. We muſt ſtart, by taking for rule, that, where God, and eſpecially where the love that is due to him is in queſtion, we give to the expreſſions of the law which commands this love, all the extent of which they are ſuſceptible. If, therefore, on account of the infinity of the object, that extent may go to infinitude; and if, moreover, the terms of the law admit of no modification, nor reſtriction, to give them any would be evidently to weaken and diſtort their meaning.

I am commanded to love God with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my ſoul, and with all my ſtrength; it is God who ſpeaks thus. Could he have expreſſed himſelf in a manner more energetic, more general, and more unlimited? Find here, if you can, any bounds that

that are ſet to the faculties of man in themſelves, or in the increaſe of them; or to the purity of the motive, or to the continuity of his love; there are none, and there can be none. Whatever is in a rational creature that is capable of concurring to the love of God, the underſtanding, memory, and will, the affective and ſenſitive powers of the ſoul, all ſhould be employed. The body and its faculties are not to be excepted; not even things external, as far as they are at the diſpoſal of the ſoul. And all that the ſoul is, all that it has, all that depends upon it, ſhould be conſecrated to the love of God. Nor is it to be a part only of the heart, of the mind, of the ſoul, and of its ſtrength; but the whole heart, and the ſame of the others: ſo that if there be in my heart an affection; in my mind, a thought; in my ſoul, a free motion; in my ſtrength, an effort; a ſtep; an action that does not tend directly or indirectly to God; that has ſome other object beſides God; that has not at leaſt a remote reference to God, I do not give him all that I owe to him, and all that he exacts; and thereby fail in fulfilling the commandment.

As to the purity of the motive, it ariſes from theſe words: *The Lord thy God.* Who can pretend to ſay, to what height ſhould reach the purity of a love, that has for its object the only Being, the abſolute Being, the infinitely perfect Being,

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Being, the Being infinitely amiable in himſelf, the Being by whom and for whom alone all other beings exiſt? The divine love cannot be ſo pure as it ſhould be, but in God. In creatures, it neceſſarily degenerates; and for this reaſon, they are obliged inceſſantly to labour to purify it; knowing that their love will be always ſo; and that, ſhould they live upon earth for millions of ages, being totally taken up with that object, their love would never attain ſuch a degree of purity as not to be capable of addition.

Laſtly, in reſpect to the continuity of love, it is evident that the obligation of loving God embraces all the inſtants of our life; ſince the reaſons for loving him always ſubſiſt and act, and allow us no interval for the leaſt diſpenſation. The love of God ought not to be leſs continual than prayer, through the intention and the diſpoſition of the ſoul. Beſides, love is the life of the heart; to the heart, to love is to reſpire; which makes St. Gregory of Nazianzen ſay, that the acts of divine love ſhould be as frequent as thoſe of reſpiration; as God is more neceſſary to the life of the ſoul, than the air is to the life of the body. From whence it is eaſy to conclude, that this love ought to influence our actions, and render them ſupernatural and holy. It is the doctrine of St. Paul, *Whether you eat or drink, or whatſoever elſe you do, do*

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do all to the glory of God *. To act for the glory of God is doubtleſs to act through a motive of the pureſt love. Now if eating, drinking, and ſleeping; if the relaxations that are neceſſary both for ſoul body, and other ſuch like actions, ought to be animated with a motive of God's glory; with much greater reaſon, the ſame ſhould be ſaid of all thoſe actions that are more ſerious and important.

Nor are we to imagine, that this is only a mere counſel, and a point of perfection; for it is a real obligation, and the greateſt of obligations by which man can be bound. Deliberately to exclude the glory of God from any thought, word, or action whatſoever; or to think, ſay, or do, through a motive that is incompatible with his glory, is manifeſtly a ſin, more or leſs grievous, according to the intention and the quality of the ſubject. Let not timorous ſouls be alarmed at this. I do not ſay, that a failure in this duty, that is incumbent on all our free acts, is at all times a conſiderable breach of it; but I ſay, that it is a breach; and that the chriſtian, at whatſoever moment he may be aſked for the motive that cauſes him to act, ought to be in a diſpoſition of anſwering, that either his immediate or remote motive is the glory of God. If this be exactly true, what becomes

* 1 Cor. x. 31.

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becomes of the major part of chriſtians, and with what a multitude of faults do not their lives teem?

But, it may be ſaid, the thing is ſo trifling, and ſo inſignificant in itſelf. No matter. God conſiders the thing leſs, than he does its motive; and it is this very motive which he claims, and which ultimately ought to tend towards him. Your direct view may be your health, your ſettling in life, your fortune, and even your amuſement; but all that muſt bear a reference to a chriſtian and ſupernatural end, which is no other than the glory of God. Even your ſalvation, and all that leads you to it, ſhould be ſubordinate to the glory and the love of God. If in things of leſs conſequence you do not pay attention to this important end, in which are comprehended all other laudable and lawful ends, inſenſibly and gradually you will neglect it on more important occaſions, and will expoſe yourſelf to conſiderable tranſgreſſions.

You aſk, how it is poſſible to have at all times the love of God in view? And I aſk, how a chriſtian can be for one moment without that view? I do not ſay, an expreſs and formal view, but at leaſt intentional and virtual. Love with all your heart, and you will readily conceive, how he who loves, does all through love, and for love. Can you be ignorant of what a very

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very ſmall attention to the motions of your heart would readily teach you; that all human paſſions are reducible to love, and that the whole conduct of our life is regulated by that? What makes this truth difficult to be conceived, and ſtill more to be practiſed, is, that you do not love God; or that your love is divided; or in ſhort, that another love rules your love for him.

The worldly chriſtian, for inſtance, who is a ſlave to ſelf-love, and paſſionately fond of earthly things, will never be able to conceive what it is to love God; nor yet the nature and the extent of that precept. And conſequently he reduces the obligation of it almoſt to nothing. He thinks he complies with it, by performing ſome exteriour duties of religion, and avoiding ſome certain grievous offences. But in other reſpects, his mind and heart are taken up with his temporal concerns; the ſucceſs of which he ardently purſues; he is taken up with his humours and fancies, with feaſting, gaming, and company keeping; which, without ſcruple, he indulges; provided he does not fall into any notable exceſs. What room can the love of God find in all this, ſince it has no ſhare in it? Such a man only loves himſelf, and his own well-being; he only loves the world, and the things of the world; his heart is full of every

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every thing but of God, to whom he is insensible; the thought of whom is painful, and even troublesome to his worldly mind.

There are others who love God enough to avoid what has any appearance of evil; but they go no farther; and they love not enough to do all that has any appearance of good. This is a very common disposition among those who serve God through self-love, from the fear of being lost, or with the view of being saved. It is not precisely an offence against God which they apprehend, but the evil that would result from it to themselves. Nevertheless, when we truly love any one, we are not less solicitous to do what is pleasing to him, than to shun what may displease him; we do not stop at not offending him, but wish to be agreeable to him; we seek every occasion that may effect our wish, and feel sorry for every opportunity we neglect. Unless love produce this effect, it does not deserve that name, even in the notions of the world; how then can it be deemed such in the notions of God? and how can he be satisfied with a love, of which in fact he is not the object? If you loved me, might he say, would you content yourself with not offending me, because your interest is concerned? Would you not be desirous to please me, by doing what you know is agreeable to me? Would you not be as sorry for the omission of an act of virtue,

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as for the commiſſion of a fault? If my glory; if the hallowing of my name, were your principal object, would you not anticipate my wiſhes? Would a rigorous injunction be neceſſary; or would not the bare intimation of my will and pleaſure be ſufficient? Thoſe who truly love me, aim at doing that which is right, good, and perfect; they are averſe from evil, and turn towards virtue; their firſt object is my intereſt; which when they ſeek, they find their own. Judge of my friendſhip, and of what it requires, from the principles and rules of human friendſhip, and ſtand confounded.

O ye ungenerous and imperfect chriſtians, who are incomparably the greateſt number; you flatter yourſelves that you love God, and yet you undergo no inconveniency; the leaſt effort is painful to you; you are for ever reckoning what his ſervice coſts you; and are apt to imagine that he is more your debtor, than you are his. How can you dwell in your error? What bounds do you ſet to the love of God? Such only which you are pleaſed to give it; ſuch as lay you under no reſtraint, and bring on no trouble. Would this be deemed loving, among men? and you would have it to be a ſufficient love for God? You are truly blind, and truly miſtaken.

I comply, you ſay, with what is eſſential in the precept. How do you know that? By what

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what authority, and by what rule, do you diſtinguiſh between what is eſſential in the precept, and what is not? Shew me anywhere that God authoriſes you to make that diſtinction; name me one ſaint who has ever made it, and who has followed it in practice. I poſitively decide, that to ſtop at what you call the eſſential of the love of God, is openly to go againſt the very eſſence of that precept, the nature of which admits of no limits.

I mean, you reply, by the eſſential, that which I cannot omit, without expoſing myſelf to damnation. If that be your meaning, I anſwer, in the firſt place, that you never will be able abſolutely to determine it; ſecondly, that, in doubt, unleſs you declare for God againſt yourſelf, you will run the hazard which you are apprehenſive of; thirdly, that the mean, ſervile, and intereſted diſpoſition, by which you bound the precept to what does not expoſe you to ruin, is bad, and ought to make you tremble; becauſe it is at leaſt doubtful, whether it does not exclude the love of God; a love which it is eſſential to conſider God in, and for himſelf. If you do not conſider him habitually in this manner, you have not habitually the love of God, that is evident; and if you be not in habitual charity, you are in a ſtate of damnation, which is equally evident.

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As to you, O faithful ſouls, who ſincerely love God; who have no other deſire, than that of loving him ſtill more; who are in deſolation, when on examining your heart, you feel not that love; and on that account, are afflicted at your ſmalleſt faults, leſt they ſhould make you loſe your only ſovereign good; be of good heart, not from your own notions, but from the deciſions of a pious and experienced director. It is proper to be under ſuch a fear, but it ſhould have juſt bounds, and never excite trouble.

In order to quiet your mind, you ſhould know that all faults of mere frailty, in which there is no deliberation; of which you repent; at which you humble yourſelves; which you ſtrive to correct, and from which you conſtantly beg of God to preſerve you, are not faults that weaken the love of God; on the contrary, the good effects they produce contribute to increaſe it. You muſt carefully diſtinguiſh the real love from the ſenſible love; the love that is ſimply affective, from the effective love. The real love is wholly ſpiritual, as is its object; it reſides in the centre of the will; and of itſelf, it does not cauſe itſelf to be felt. But it preſides over our intentions; it inſpires our motives, and governs our actions; it animates every thing, without making its appearance; without even being thought of. The ſenſible love does

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not depend upon us; it is a certain sweetness that God diffuses in the heart, when he pleases, and when he judges it necessary for our advancement. It often happens, that self-love slips in, from a desire of experiencing this pleasing sentiment; and that is always the case, when that desire is not tranquil, and perfectly submissive to the divine will. When we are weaned from the sentiment of love, we are not to imagine that we thereby lose its reality. On the contrary, our love is never more pure, than when disengaged from all sentiment, from reflection, and perception.

The affective love is very good in itself; but we must judge of its solidity from the effects it produces. In vain should we multiply acts of the love of God, if they be barren; they only serve to deceive us: nor is it very uncommon to fall into this delusion, by mistaking an empty show for the thing itself. The real love is therefore the effective love; that which shows itself by its works, *He*, says our Saviour, *that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me* *. The action and the practice of virtue, is the real proof of the love; because it costs pains to act, and to use violence to nature; whereas it is an easy matter to say that we love, without going farther. The effective love is not without affection: for who could combat

* Joan. xiv. 21.

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combat and mortify himſelf inceſſantly for God, if his love were not affectionate? But this affection habitually dwells in the heart, and only ſhews itſelf occaſionally by formal acts. Nay, it ſometimes is ſo very deeply hidden, as not to be perceptible; becauſe it becomes, as it were, natural to the ſoul; and God thus conceals it, that the ſoul may find nothing in itſelf to lean upon, and that it may drop the habit of reflecting on itſelf.

If therefore there be occaſions, ſuch as ſtrong temptations, in which you ſtand in need of being ſatisfied that you love God, examine yourſelf on the effects of your love. See whether you be faithful in mortifying yourſelf in everything, in liſtening to grace, and in doing what it demands of you; ſee whether at all times you prefer God's cauſe to your own; ſee whether you lament your ſmalleſt tranſgreſſions, and try to repair and expiate them; if ſuch be your habitual diſpoſition, let your conſcience be at reſt, and ceaſe to be ſolicitous about your love for God.

But ſtill continue to love with ſimplicity, without ſo many reflections on your own diſpoſitions; as they are only the ſuggeſtions of a refined ſelf-love, and cannot fail being hurtful to your ſpiritual progreſs.

O my God, I did not know till now, what it is to love thee. Thy love is an ocean, without

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ſhore or bottom; into which I muſt plunge, as into an abyſs. How remote have I been from loving thee as I ought, and as thou deſerveſt! May I begin at laſt; may I begin every day; may I never ſet bounds or limits to my love. May it always increaſe; may I always find it too weak, too little worthy of thee, O infinite beauty, O infinite perfection! When will my love come up to thine for me? Never: it is impoſſible it ſhould; and therefore I never ſhould be ſatisfied with myſelf on that head. Thou haſt loved me as a God; I ſhall not love thee, and I cannot love thee, but as a poor, miſerable creature. At leaſt, O Lord, grant me to love thee with all the capacity of my heart; dilate it; empty it of every other affection; and fill it, thou alone, from this moment and for ever. *Amen.*

NINTH

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NINTH LESSON.

THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF GOD.

EVERY thing in the gospel is either counsel or command; and consequently, every thing contained in it has a tendency to practice. All our lights and sentiments are only given us to that end; and unless we make use of them for that purpose, they only serve to render us more culpable. What would it avail us to be instructed in the nature, the properties, and the advantages of the divine love; or even to have pious wishes and affectionate inclinations, unless they produce effects? Less theory, and more practice; it is thus that good and solid christians think. The principles and the motives are necessary, because they spur on to action, which they direct and support; but yet it is to action to which all should be referred. And this is so much the more true, that in every thing, but especially in what relates to the love of God, it is from practice that knowledge is obtained and perfected. Let us therefore resolve to reason less on this matter, and to do more.

The practice of the love of God in detail, embraces all christian virtues; which, under different

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rent names, are nothing more than the exercise of this love relative to different objects. But in order to circumscribe a lesson which otherwise would be too extensive, I shall only speak of the love of God, as it is of itself; and even then I shall not touch upon every particular, to avoid anticipating what other lessons may give me an opportunity of explaining.

Love, or charity, is a gift of God: we begin to have it, when he infuses a desire of it into our souls. This desire is like the first spark of it; it is our concern to turn it, by our conception, into a fire that inflames us. Jesus Christ declares, that *he came to cast fire on the earth; and what will he, but that it be kindled* *?

As God wishes us to love him, he is always disposed to grant us his love; if on our part we are also desirous of it, let us ardently, frequently, and perseveringly ask of him this precious gift. To this end, let us direct all our prayers; let it be the object of our holy aspirations. Must I say it? In the service of God, we are too attentive to our own interests, and not sufficiently so to his. There is nothing more common than to meet with souls, that are occupied with their sins, and for ever solicitous about the pardon of them; who think of nothing but satisfactory works, and of gaining indulgences. That is not amiss, and, I am far from

* Luke xii. 49.

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blaming it. But it would be much better, even in behalf of the object, which they have in view, were they to think more of the love of God; were they to turn that way their chief pious practices; and were they to beg it of him as the grace by excellence; with love they would obtain whatever they wish for besides, more assuredly, and more abundantly. Let us then never cease reiterating our entreaties, until they are successful; and when we have reason to believe that love has taken possession of our heart, let us daily pray for its increase, and for grace to persevere in it till death. We cannot insist too much upon this head; we cannot put up a more pleasing prayer. Why then go to books to find a prayer, that you ought constantly to carry in the bottom of your heart?

We are not, however, to stop here. Love increases as it is exercised; and its increase depends upon us. Let us therefore make frequent, express, and formal acts of it, until it become as habitual and natural for us to love, as to breathe. Besides the times that are destined for prayer, let us have some stated moments in the day for the performing of those acts; and let us entreat God so frequently to inspire us with them, as to render them in some shape continual. But let us guard against performing them superficially, and by rote: they must be intimate, dictated by the heart, and accompanied

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accompanied with a degree of recollection. The love of God, in its kind, is a paſſion, and is even much ſtronger than the moſt violent natural paſſions; becauſe it ſubdues them all. And is it not the property of all paſſions to keep us conſtantly intent upon their reſpective objects? ſo as to live more for that object, than for ourſelves, and to be more taken up with it, than with ourſelves? Thus ſhould it be with the love of God; it ſhould attract all our thoughts and affections, and the acts of it ſhould ſucceed each other in our heart, almoſt without interruption. This is what is experienced in the firſt ſtages of the inward life, where all is love; all breathings of love that abſorb every other ſentiment, and that with wonderful delight. At that juncture, it would be impoſſible to reckon up the acts, that are multiplied by day and by night, and which, properly ſpeaking, make but one continuity. In this manner is love practiſed in a heart where God ſovereignly reigns. Did we know what it was, what efforts would we not make to experience it?

It is not ſufficient to practice love; we muſt alſo endeavour to purify it. At firſt, a good ſhare of ſelf-love intervenes, which is unavoidable; and which God for a while permits. But in proportion as he beſtows his lights, and points out to us what on our part is impure that ſlips into that heavenly flame, it becomes

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our duty to be extremely attentive, to profit by ſuch light, and gradually to purify what may tarniſh and ſully our love. Hence we muſt endeavour to diſengage our motives from all that appertains not to God. We muſt habituate ourſelves to conſider, before every thing elſe, his glory, his pleaſure, and the fulfilling of his will; and without excluding other ſecondary motives, that always muſt hold the firſt place. This diſpoſition is not common, even among the beſt chriſtians; and yet it is the moſt excellent, the moſt glorious to God, and every one ought to endeavour to arrive at it. I ſhall ſhew, in its proper place, that ſuch is the drift of the Lord's Prayer, which would lead ſtraight to the practice of pure love, were we duly penetrated with the ſentiments it contains.

It is not the work of one day thus perfectly to purify our motives. Self-love, when driven from one place, ſhews itſelf elſewhere, under a new form. I do not imagine, that with an ordinary grace it can be entirely baniſhed from the ſoul, unleſs God himſelf undertook the work, and employed the crucible of trials to ſeparate from charity all foreign alloy. Let us, however, do what depends upon us; and let us conjure him to give us a helping hand in the undertaking, in order to ſupply our own inſufficiency; whenever he ſhall think it expedient, he will comply

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comply with our requeſt, if our prayer be ſincere, and if we neglect nothing on our part for the obtaining of ſo great a favour.

No one is ignorant that love increaſes by practices of piety, by good works, and by frequenting the ſacraments. But the whole depends upon the manner in which thoſe things are performed. Let love animate your prayers, and your prayers in return will increaſe your love. Let your good works be done through a motive of love, and an increaſe of love will be the reward. Let love conduct you to the holy table, and you will come from it at each time with a new degree of love. If you do not reap this fruit from ſo many prayers, good works, and communions, only blame yourſelf, and your imperfect diſpoſitions. You recite a quantity of prayers; but your mind is not attentive to them, and they do not ſtart from your heart. You only pray for your own intereſt; and you do not conſider that your greateſt intereſt is to love God properly. You aſk every thing of him, beſides love; which you ought to aſk for, above every thing. You do good works; but ſelf-love has a great ſhare in them: you have human views; it is yourſelf that you conſider; and amongſt the many deeds you perform, there is hardly one that is done purely for God. You communicate, either through cuſtom, and without thinking on ſo great an action; or with awe,

awe, with fear, and almoſt without any ſentiment of love. You have a good motive, when you mean to gain an indulgence, to honour a ſaint, to ſatisfy a particular devotion; but have you ever had for motive, the uniting yourſelf with Jeſus Chriſt, as with the ſource of love? If this motive be the beſt, the moſt ſuitable to a ſacrament, which is all love, and of which the only intent is to increaſe love in your heart, why do you not make uſe of it, without neglecting the others? and why does not your principal intention direct itſelf thither? St. Paul exhorts you to *be zealous for the better gifts* *; love includes them all, and even ſurpaſſes them; and, according to the doctrine of the ſame apoſtle, they are nothing without love.

Even profane love, much more ſo the divine, which is the moſt intimate of loves, ſeeks retirement and ſolitude to converſe with its beloved object. God, therefore, being always preſent to the heart that loves him, engages it to withdraw itſelf, as much as it can from creatures, that it may collect itſelf within itſelf; there to enjoy the moſt delicious of intercourſes, and to conſecrate to God thoſe moments in which, being diſengaged from every other concern, it is wholly taken up with him. And this is the holy increaſe of the preſence of God, and of prayer; which is at once the principal and the effect

* 1 Cor. xii. 31.

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effect of love. Love God intimately, and you always will have him preſent; and you will only aim at being alone with him; and you will ſhun men and worldly things, that diſtract you from his preſence. You will lend yourſelf to exteriour affairs, no farther than God demands of you; but you will barely lend yourſelf, without ever being taken up with them; becauſe you will have an inward occupation, which you will prefer to every other.

You who make profeſſion of piety, is it in this manner that you preſerve and nouriſh the love of God? You fancy that you love him; and you love neither retirement, nor ſolitude, nor prayer. You only think of your affairs; you have a number of connexions, and you ſeek to multiply them. You find ſolitude irkſome and inſupportable; your whole day paſſes in receiving and paying viſits, in reading or writing letters, in gratifying your curioſity in learning public news, and in communicating what you have learnt; and then you give ſome moments to God, before whom you preſent yourſelf, with a diſſipated mind, and a dry, barren heart. If you read a good book, it is only with your eyes; you neither underſtand nor reliſh it; it at moſt makes the ſlighteſt impreſſion, that in a moment is effaced. If you mean to pray, you take up a book, from having nothing of your own. If you try to meditate, your meditation

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is inceſſantly croſſed by impertinent fancies, and a calm recollection appears to you almoſt impoſſible. As to that ſort of prayer, which by far is the beſt, and that ſecret communication of the heart with God, you are unacquainted with it; you do not love it, and you are not capable of practiſing it. You cannot conceive how any one can ſpend an hour in ſilence, before the divine Majeſty; and you ſet that down as a loſs of time, as a pious idleneſs, or even as a dangerous illuſion. And yet you flatter yourſelf that you love! which happens becauſe you have never ſeriouſly reflected on the nature and the effects of love.

As to you, who are inward men, whom God has brought into ſolitude to ſpeak to your heart, to whom he has given to taſte the ſweetneſs of prayer, through the infuſion of his holy love; be greatly careful, eſpecially when that love ſhall ceaſe to be ſenſible, not to ſpread yourſelves abroad, any farther than God requires; be careful not to be diſſipated by uſeleſs converſations, not to be curious in what happens in life, not to overload yourſelves with unneceſſary concerns, even though charity and zeal ſhould ſeem to be your motive; particularly be careful not to omit prayer, in whatſoever ſtate of languor, of dryneſs, and inſenſibility you may be. Provided you have given no occaſion to ſuch a ſtate, be at reſt; and if you deſerve a reproach, immediately

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diately repair the fault; but once more, never abandon prayer, which is the chief fuel of love. If you take from it its nouriſhment, it will gradually decay, and at laſt will periſh.

But do not imagine that you can perſevere either in recollection, or in prayer, or in the divine love, without the mortification of the heart. This is the capital point; the practice of which never ſhould be interrupted or ſlackened. You carry within you an irreconcilable enemy to the love of God, which is ſelf-love. Theſe two loves are incompatible: where one of the two reigns, it neceſſarily excludes the other. If, therefore, you wiſh to advance in the love of God, you muſt reſolutely attack ſelf-love; you muſt fight it every where, and purſue it from one intrenchment to another, without any truce, until you have baniſhed it from your heart. This is in ſuch manner the work of God, that it is alſo yours: the ſucceſs of it demands of you the greateſt efforts; and a ſteady, reſolute will. Inceſſantly pray to God that he would enlighten you on the malignity and ſubtlety of this enemy; that he would diſcover to you its wiles and windings, and that he would give you an invincible force, that you may never ſpare it. Among all the practices, this is the moſt indiſpenſable as well as the moſt difficult. It is a well-known maxim, that the love of God can live in us, but in proportion

tion as ſelf-love dies; and though we all agree in this truth, there are very few who are willing to purchaſe the love of God, by the ſacrifice of ſelf-love. The divine love increaſes alſo by whatever contradicts the will, abaſes the pride of the mind, and weans from earthly things. And therefore contradictions, humiliations, and human diſappointments are precious to one who loves; he ſtudies to bear them in a chriſtian light, and to improve them into an increaſe of his love. He endeavours to ſtifle all ſenſibility and reflection, all inward rebellions and complains; he does not murmur; ſeeks no human conſolation; he enters into no juſtification, unleſs it be abſolutely neceſſary. He condemns himſelf for the leaſt indeliberate motions of impatience and irritation; and labours with himſelf until he become, as it were, inſenſible to every ill treatment, and to every event.

Laſtly, divine love is augmented by ſacrifices of every kind, both exterior and interior. Of its own nature, it only wiſhes to give; it is ſatisfied no further than it gives; it abhors the leaſt reſerve; it is happy when it has ſtripped itſelf of every thing for God. Wherefore the occaſions that preſent themſelves of giving any thing to God, ought to appear to you very precious; do not neglect any one of them; and if you meet with none, lament your loſs, and beg of God to put you in the way of them.

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them. Give with heart and goodwill, and without any other regret than that you give not enough. The more nature ſhall feel, the more will your love increaſe. It will be at its height, when after having robbed you of every thing, it ſhall remain alone, and be the ſole poſſeſſor of your heart. Then you will be able to ſay with truth, with St. Francis, *My God, thou art my all*; out of thee I have nothing, and in thee I have all; thy riches, thy felicity make mine.

Thoſe who love, ſtand not in need of any leſſon on this head; they need only follow the inſtinct of love. As it is the moſt pleaſing, ſo it is the moſt imperious of maſters; I would ſay the moſt tyrannic, were it not infinitely juſt in all its pretenſions. When it has gained over a heart by its charms, with what force does it afterwards dominate! with what authority does it command! how it ſtrips the ſoul without pity! how it ſeeks every where to ſee if there be any thing left to begin! how it ſeizes what the heart has not courage to yield, and yet does not dare to refuſe. It makes of every thing its prey; devours every thing; and never being ſated, it expects at every hour new aliment. The fire is but a faint image of its activity, and of its inſatiable avidity. It muſt reign alone in a ſoul, as ſoon as it poſſeſſes it, and diſpoſes of it at pleaſure, it breaks and overſets

overſets whatever oppoſes it; it changes and converts into itſelf all the thoughts of the mind, and all the motions of the heart.

Let us therefore give ourſelves, let us devote ourſelves to the divine love; then let us allow it to act, and let us faithfully correſpond with its action. We never ſhall love God as we ought, but through the impulſe of his grace. What are, alas! all our feeble endeavours! are we even capable of it, we who are repugnant to the divine love with all the force of the human *ſelf*. Let us pray that this grace may deſcend into our ſouls, accompanied with the ſacred fire that darts from the heart of God; that it may enkindle it in ours; that it may keep up its activity; that it may inſtruct us in what we are to do on our part; that it may excite and ſupport our will in the execution.

O my God! thou alone knoweſt the meaſure of love, which thou haſt deſtined for me, and which I am to fill up. Do not permit that, through my own fault, the eternal deſigns of thy goodneſs over me, ſhould not have full effect. I am willing, O Lord, perfectly to fulfil them; but what can I do without thee, ſince it is thou that giveſt me that will? Grant me to love thee with all the plenitude of my heart; to love thee always; to love thee more and more; to teſtify my love for thee, by every poſſible means. How far have I been from beginning

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ning to love thee, as ſoon as I began to know thee. I ever, therefore, ſhall have to reproach myſelf for having begun too late. But grant that I may repair the paſt, by my ardour and fidelity for the future. I have no longer but one deſire, which is, not to quit this world, until I have attained to the degree of love which thou haſt fixed for me, and by which I am to glorify thee through all eternity. *Amen.*

TENTH

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TENTH LESSON.

THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

AFTER having ſaid that the greateſt and the firſt commandment was the love of God, Jeſus Chriſt added: *The ſecond is like to this, thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf* *. By the word neighbour, he means all men, without exception. And on what does he ground this precept? He grounds it on the firſt; to which, he ſays, this is like. That is to ſay, that I am to love God; I am to love the men who are made to the image and to the reſemblance of God. If I love the original, my love ſhould proportionably extend itſelf to the image that repreſents it. This quality of image of God, formed by God's own hand, and for that reaſon deſtined to know, to love, and to poſſeſs God, is the brighteſt of our titles; the primary cauſe of all the good qualities which he has placed in us, and the foundation of all our duties, as well with reſpect to God, as with reſpect to our fellow-men. With reſpect to God: the image only exiſts for the ſake of the original, to which this image ought to be totally referred. With reſpect to our neighbour: the ſame image of God, which I behold in myſelf, I behold in every other man: and as I have no other

* Matt. xxii. 39.

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other reaſon to love myſelf than the quality of image of God, I owe the ſame love to thoſe who are of the ſame nature with myſelf; under this aſpect I am to cheriſh them neither more nor leſs than myſelf.

This precept of the love of our neighbour is included in two grand maxims, of which the one forbids me to hurt him: *See thou never do to another, what thou wouldſt hate to have done to thee by another* *; and the other obliges me to do good to him. *All things whatſoever you would that men ſhould do to you, do you alſo to them* †. Theſe two maxims, which comprehend all, and the practice of which is of an infinite extent, are announced, the one in the Old Teſtament, and the other in the New. They are a ſure guide for conſcience; I need only apply them on all occaſions to the conduct which I hold with regard to others, in my judgments and affections; in my words and actions. All the abuſes and diſorders; all the injuſtices, and almoſt all the evils that overflow the earth, come from a deficiency of the former; peace, union, innocence, and happineſs would reign among the race of men, were the latter ſtrictly obſerved.

Reaſon clearly dictates to us theſe two rules of conduct; we carry them in the heart. Our reaſon

* Tob. iv. 16. † Matt. vii. 12.

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reaſon and our heart equally concur to approve us, when we are faithful to them, and to condemn us when we violate them. As long as we are in our ſober ſenſes, it is impoſſible for us to deceive ourſelves in either the one or the other point. Our natural lights, and our moral inſtinct, therefore, ſubſcribe here to the equality and to the neceſſity of this grand precept of the goſpel; and at all times the idolater, as well as the chriſtian; the vulgar, as well as the wiſe and reflecting man, have admired that beautiful ſaying of a pagan poet: *I am man; nothing that intereſts another man, is foreign to me.*

If it be ſo, why then is this ſo juſt a precept, and ſo conformable to our nature, ſo univerſally and ſo conſtantly violated in the one of its branches, and ſo neglected in the other? Where is the chriſtian who is not here forced to pronounce againſt himſelf? I do not chooſe, that my neighbour ſhould hurt me in any thing; and by every way and means I ſeek to enrich myſelf, at the expence of my neighbour. I am jealous of my honour and reputation; and by my cenſures, my backbitings, and often calumnies, I blacken the honour, and tear the reputation of my neighbour. I expect my neighbour to put up with my humour, to excuſe my faults, and bear with my inattentions, my miſtakes, and my irregular proceedings;

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proceedings; and I excuſe nothing in my neighbour; I bear with him in nothing; I pardon him nothing. I am delicate, ſenſible, and inexorable over my own rights and pretenſions; and I trample under foot the rights and pretenſions of my neighbour. I love in others uprightneſs, frankneſs and truth; and I am all falſehood, diſſimulation, and lies, with regard to my neighbour. I wiſh to be applauded, when ſucceſsful, and to receive congratulation at my happineſs; and I meanly bear envy to the ſucceſs of my neighbour; I grieve, and ſecretly repine at it. I think myſelf deſerving of every thing; and I judge him unworthy of every thing. I expect comfort from him in my ſorrows, aſſiſtance in my wants; his counſels, his protection, and ſervices; whilſt I am cold and indifferent about his misfortunes; I no longer regard him; I no longer know him; I abandon him in his diſtreſs; I afford him no reſource by my advice, by my credit, or by any kind of ſervice.

Excluſive of a ſmall number of upright hearts, this is what men are, in regard to each other. They are wicked, either through paſſion, or from ſyſtem and reflection; and they do good but from vanity, from intereſt, from oſtentation, from human reſpect, or that they may avoid importunities; they do as little good, and as late as they can, and not till after they have made thoſe whom they oblige keenly to feel many

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a long refusal, much haughtiness, humbling and mortifying dependances.

If reason condemns them, how much more so does religion, that prescribes to Christians a more exalted love for their brethren, and of a supernatural kind? Let them listen to Jesus Christ, the great legislator, and the perfect model of charity toward mankind. *A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another*: as I have loved you, that you also love one another.* He severally repeats and inculcates it; and in what circumstance? On coming from the last supper, at the moment he was going to consummate his sacrifice; so that this commandment ought to be considered as the last will and testament of our divine Master. It is in fact remarkable, that he waited for that so interesting a moment to promulge it.

Love one another, as I have loved you. In what manner has he loved us? With a love wholly divine, that took its rise in the love which he bore to his Father, and which was only the expansion of it: with a preventing and gratuitous love that made him come down from heaven upon earth for us. O incomprehensible charity! the eternal Word made himself man; made himself flesh, for the love of men. He is become our brother, and has made us partakers of the quality of children of God. He was born with

* Joan. xiii. 34.

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with the deſign of giving his life for us; on his entrance into the world, he accepted his ſacrifice; he carried each one of us in his heart all the days of his life; we were preſent to his mind, when he was ſhedding his blood on the croſs; which he ſhed for the remiſſion of our ſins, to reconcile us with his Father, and to reinſtate us with advantage in our primitive rights, to merit for us the eternal happineſs and the proper graces that lead us to it.

What had we done, and by what had we renderd ourſelves worthy of ſo ſignal a benefit? As God, we had offended him; and his juſtice exacted our eternal perdition. As man, we have perſecuted, blaſphemed, outraged, and fixed him to the croſs through the hands of the Jews and Gentiles. His death was the work of ſin; and we are all ſinners. He then had before his eyes our iniquities, our ingratitude, the abuſe of his graces, or rather *he bore them in his body upon the tree* *; and he had us not leſs in view than his executioners, when he ſaid, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do* †. There is no exaggeration here; it is all literally true: ſince, according to the doctrine of St. Paul, whoſoever renders himſelf guilty of one mortal ſin, *crucifies again*, for as much as in him lies, *the Son of God, and makes him a mockery* ‡. It is thus that Jeſus Chriſt has loved us,

* 1 Pet. ii. 24. † Luc. xxiii. 34. ‡ Heb. vi. 6.

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us, and ceaſes not to love us: continually offering his blood for us in heaven; daily renewing in all parts of the world the ſacrifice of the croſs in that of our altars, applying to us the merits of it; and notwithſtanding our obſtinate reſiſtance, never abandoning us to our laſt gaſp, which decides our eternity. What an example of love! It is a God who gives it us, and propoſes it to our imitation.

He has ſaid that there was no greater love than for a man to lay down his life for his friends *. This was the caſe, before he appeared upon the earth; and the ſingle averred inſtance of the kind that profane antiquity exhibits, has been, and continues to be a ſubject of admiration. But Jeſus Chriſt has done more; he has laid down his life for his enemies, both for thoſe who in fact deprived him of it, and for thoſe who were to deprive him of it only by their intention and evil will; and that not only once, but as often as they ſin mortally.

Now it is in this manner that he commands us to love one another. Had he not reaſon to ſtyle this injunction a new commandment, ſince it goes ſo much beyond what the natural law preſcribes? It is then true that the chriſtian, after the example of Jeſus Chriſt, ought to love his neighbour, be he who he will, even his enemy, to ſuch a paſs as to be diſpoſed to ſacrifice

* Joan. xv. 13.

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crifice his fortune, his reputation, and his life, to procure him eternal ſalvation. If, in the diſpoſition of the heart, his love does not reach ſhat, he does not fulfil the grand commandment of the new law; he is a diſciple of Jeſus Chriſt but by name; he pronounces before hand ſentence againſt himſelf; ſince he renounces that love by which he has been redeemed, and which is the primary title of his ſalvation. Let us ſeriouſly ponder this truth; and let us ſee what ought to be our ſentiments and our conduct towards our neighbour, in conſequence of a diſpoſition that is ſo ſupernatural, ſo ſublime, and at the ſame time ſo indiſpenſable.

Jeſus Chriſt has ſo much at heart the execution of his commandment, that he will have it to be the mark by which his diſciples are to be known *. Every mark ſhould have ſomething diſtinctive, and be noways equivocal. It is therefore neceſſary that the diſciples of Jeſus Chriſt ſhould love one another in a manner that characteriſes them in the eyes of other men, that draws their attention, and induces them to aſk, What kind of people are theſe, who love one another thus? Such were the primitive chriſtians of Jeruſalem, who placed their fortunes in common, and had but one heart, and one ſoul. And this their union rendered them dear to the people, who beſtowed on them much

* Joan. xiii. 35.

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much praiſe; and who, through reſpect, had not courage to join with them. Such alſo were thoſe who ſo cordially practiſed hoſpitality towards Pacomius, and other pagan ſoldiers, that he was quite aſtoniſhed at it; and having learnt who thoſe men were whom he found ſo charitable, from that moment he reſolved to embrace chriſtianity. Such were, in general, the faithful of the primitive church. The heathens, as Tertullian relates, were in admiration at their mutual charity; and uſed to ſay the one to the other, *See how they love one another.* They at firſt calumniated their aſſemblies, their *agapes*, and the name of brethren, which they aſſumed; judging of chriſtians by themſelves, and preſuming that in thoſe aſſemblies the ſame diſorders happened as in theirs. But they were at laſt undeceived, and forced to do them juſtice. As to the martyrs, they not only died to preſerve their faith, but alſo to propagate it; they prayed for the people who were crying aloud for their death, for their judges, for their executioners; and their blood was a fruitful ſeed of new chriſtians. The acts that remain on them, teſtify the ardour of their charity in this point; and it is certain that the converſion of the heatheniſh world is chiefly owing to them. This ſpirit of charity was ſtill in its full vigour at the time of Julian the apoſtate. The chriſtians, did he ſay, feed their own poor and

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ours. He lamented that the heathens were very far from reſembling them in that reſpect. He acknowledged, in ſpite of him, that it was the faireſt character of chriſtianity; and made vain efforts to counterfeit it.

O charity! the ornament and glory of the primitive ages of the church, what is become of thee? Thou art no longer known nor practiſed, but by a ſmall number of chriſtians: and thou art very far from being the diſtinctive of the major part. Every one only loves himſelf, thinks only of his own intereſts; the lower ſort are oppreſſed, the poor are neglected, the ſick are abandoned; and men born for heaven, by fraud and violence ſnatch from each other, and wrangle among themſelves for the falſe good things of the earth.

Is it to be wondered at, that faith ſhould be extinct, where charity is grown ſo cold? Has not Jeſus Chriſt declared that the charity that ſhould unite his diſciples, would be the chief proof of his miſſion. *That they all may be one*, did he ſay, in his laſt prayer, *as thou, Father in in me, and I in thee; that they alſo may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou haſt ſent me* *; and again, *that they may be made perfect in one; and the world may know that thou haſt ſent me* †. Hence in the judgment of Chriſt himſelf, charity towards our neighbour, and the mutual

* Joan. xvii. 21. † Ibid. 23.

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mutual union of minds and hearts, is the moſt ſenſible demonſtration of the divinity of his religion. Although to a certain degree we might mean well in diſputing the other proofs, in our conſcience we muſt always yield to this; and we ſhall not heſitate to own that a religion that commands and inſpires ſuch ſentiments, has God for its author. I therefore ſtrike at the truth of chriſtianity, both for myſelf and others; I ſhake the principal foundation of faith, when I am deficient in charity, in whatſoever manner it may be; there is room to ſay that I believe but faintly, if I but faintly love my neighbour; and that I do not believe at all, if I be quite hard-hearted and inſenſible towards him.

Divine Maſter of charity, Model infinitely perfect of that which came down from heaven with thee, infuſe it into my heart; and may its fire conſume in me whatever may oppoſe it. Through thy help and example, may I in future love my neigbour, as thou haſt loved me. How guilty do I ſtand on this head! Alas! I have not as yet been chriſtian; I have not at yet bore the mark of thy diſciples. Render my heart as vaſt as the univerſe; may it be intereſted in the ſalvation of all men; may it inceſſantly pray to thee for this grand object, and may it be diſpoſed to procure it by every kind of ſacrifices. Render it upright and juſt towards my brethren;

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thren; this ſays but little: may it be affectionate, tender, compaſſionate, preventing, generous, at all times ready to oblige; may it be meek, patient, diſintereſted, remote from all jealouſy, from all envy, from all malignity; in a word, reform it upon thy own. May that adorable heart be always preſent to my mind, and may I ſtudy to expreſs in myſelf all its ſentiments. And penetrated with gratitude for the love thou haſt ſhewn me, I may acquit myſelf towards thee in the perſon of my brethren, whom thou commandeſt me to conſider and to treat as thyſelf. *Amen.*

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ELEVENTH LESSON.

THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.

SELF-LOVE is not leſs enemy of the love of our neighbour, than it is to the love of God; it is the only obſtacle to the fulfilling of the one and the other precept. Jealous of our own excellence, we place the beſt part of our merit in deſpiſing others; we tend with all our might to raiſe ourſelves above them; and if we cannot ſucceed, we bear them envy, we lower them at leaſt in our own mind, and thus conſole ourſelves for their elevation. Behold pride, and all its conſequences, that are ſo prejudicial to the love of our neighbour.

In loving ourſelves with an excluſive love, or what comes to the ſame, in loving nothing but with a reference to ourſelves, we ſeek our happineſs at the expence of that of others; or at leaſt without being in any pain about it; their good fortune awakens our ſuſpicions; it ſeems to us almoſt a theft of what appertains to us; becauſe, in fact, our inſatiable paſſions covet every thing, appropriate every thing to themſelves, and think every thing lawful to attain to their end. Behold cupidity, with all the injuſtices it brings on.

Delicate

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Delicate in the extreme, on what we imagine is our due; (and what bounds can be ſet on this point to our pretenſions?) we take offence at the leaſt trifle; if able, we return to our neighbour with uſury the evil he has done us; if we be not able, we retain in the heart reſentment and hatred. Behold revenge, with its fatal effects: revenge, that is practiſed in every ſhape; and that, all unjuſt as it is, appears to us ſo reaſonable, that it is the point on which we have the greateſt difficulty to ſubmit ourſelves to the goſpel.

Blind to ourſelves, admirers of our good qualities, whether real or imaginary, we do not ſee, and we will not ſee in others any thing but their faults; we affix to them thoſe which they have not; we calumniate their virtues; we ſpy their conduct to find out their failings; we feel a ſecret pleaſure in the accounts we have of them from ſlander, and we are eager in ſpreading them about. Behold malignity that infects all with its poiſon. Theſe vices, that are the ſcourges of ſociety, and a great many more, which it would be too long to enumerate, are ſo many offſprings of ſelf-love.

It would therefore be ſufficient to be well acquainted with it, and to combat it, in order to practiſe, in an excellent degree, the ſecond precept of charity. But who is the man that makes a ſerious ſtudy of his own ſelf-love; who

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dives into the injuſtice of it; who is willing to be convinced of the oppoſition it has, not only to religion, but alſo to reaſon? We may find among moraliſts plenty of reflexions on ſelf-love in general; but they are no more than vague and ſubtle ſpeculations, dictated to their authors by ſelf-love itſelf; they only repreſent them as pieces of wit, and of nice obſervation; they are read, they are admired in that reſpect, but no one thinks of applying them to himſelf. We are ſagacious enough in diſcovering the ſelf-love of others; but we ſhut our eyes to our own; and though we agree that we are not exempt from it, we always find out the ſecret for our juſtification, when we come to particulars. There is hardly any one who is willing to know himſelf; and it is ſelf-love that oppoſes it, through the fear of too clear a ſight of its deformity; nevertheleſs, without that knowledge, there can be no humility, and without humility there can be no charity.

But even when we acknowledge that in ſome certain points we are ruled by ſelf-love, we are ſtill very remote from correcting ourſelves of it. I have undertaken it, we ſay, but I could not bring it about; it is my character, I am ſo formed; I cannot reform myſelf; my neighbour muſt put up with me, ſuch as I am. Thus do we always find reaſons to juſtify and excuſe ourſelves, and it is ſelf-love that furniſhes them; it

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it is ſelf-love that, whilſt it exacts for itſelf the charity of others, diſpenſes itſelf from charity with regard to them. How then is it poſſible that the practice of that virtue ſhould not be as uncommon as it is difficult?

The detail of the duties that charity impoſes on us, is endleſs. It is no ſmall thing to have an exact knowledge of them, and to diſcharge them according to occurrences. The negative part of this precept, that forbids hurting our neighbour, is more limited, and in general we are better inſtructed in it; or at leaſt with a little reflection, it is eaſy to obtain inſtruction: becauſe it holds with the natural law, the principles of which are engraved in every heart. An upright man will find no difficulty in refraining from hurting his neighbour both in ſpirituals and temporals. But the poſitive duties that charity preſcribes are of a greater extent; and thoſe we do not ſufficiently ſtudy, and ſtill leſs do we try to practiſe.

The world in this reſpect confines itſelf to politeneſs, which is but a phantom of charity, which only conſiſts in words; and to define it properly, is only a mutual and tacit convention to flatter each other. Charity does not exclude real politeneſs; it even ſuppoſes it, or it eminently ſupplies it. But it is ſincere, cordial, and effective, which politeneſs always is not, and

and it acts through motives by far more elevated.

It is only in the gospel, in the epistles of the apostles, in the examples of Jesus Christ, of his disciples, and of the primitive christians, that we can perfectly learn the duties of charity. Read those divine writings, study those models, especially the model by excellence; enter into the sentiments of his heart; be well persuaded that they ought to be yours. Entreat him to enlighten you on a matter that is so important to your salvation and perfection Then practice according to the lights you receive, you will daily acquire new lights; and at last you will become consummated in the science of charity.

It embraces almost all other virtues; and it supposes those which have God for their immediate object. Of this you may be convinced, from the admirable description of them by St. Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians; and it is not without reason that he has said, that *he who loves his neighbour, has filled the law.* St. John, the apostle of charity, thought the same; and besides the proof we draw of it from his epistles, St. Jerome relates, that in his extreme old age, not being able to hold a long discourse to the faithful, he was satisfied with saying, *My dear children, love ye one another;* and

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and on his disciples expressing their surprise at so frequent a repetition, he answered, *that it was the precept of the Lord, which alone is sufficient, if it be fulfilled.* From hence we may judge what extent these two apostles gave it. They perfectly understood the spirit of the christian law, of which love is the plenitude. They knew that, as we cannot love God, without loving our neighbour; so it is impossible to love our neighbour, without loving God. They also knew the well-ordered love of ourselves is inseparable from those two loves; and that we are deficient in both, from our not understanding our real interests. Let us not, therefore, deceive ourselves; let us be assured that we cannot be perfect christians, any other way than by perfect charity.

Not to hurt any one, either in his fortune or reputation, either in his rights or lawful pretensions; not to hurt him either in deed or by will and simple desire, is merely to be just. And yet how few christians have a conscience that is entirely clear on that head? To be charitable, we must do, or at least be sincerely willing to do to others all the good that we would wish others to do to us in the same circumstances; and even more spiritual than temporal good; each one according to his respective station, and within his reach: in as much as the spiritual advantage is of a much greater consequence;

conſequence; and as, according to the divine appointment, the good temporal ſhould be referred to the ſpiritual. I do no harm to my neighbour, I wiſh him none; may the evil I wiſh him fall upon myſelf; I try to live peaceably with all the world. This is the language of many chriſtians, to which they confine their charity, and imagine that God demands nothing more. They are clumſily miſtaken, and do not reflect that the beneficence of God, with regard to men, is the model of that which Jeſus Chriſt propoſes to us towards our fellow-men. For in this account, he ſays: *Be you perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect* *. *Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that perſecute and calumniate you: that you may be the children of your Father, who is in heaven* †. In the diſtribution which he makes to men of temporal goods, he does not conſult their merit, but his own bounty; he makes his ſun riſe alike upon the good and the bad, and rains upon the juſt and the unjuſt. In the ſupernatural order of things, he wills the ſalvation of all; and furniſhes the proper means to all. If in this reſpect his providence is hidden from us, it is not leſs effective; and we ſhall one day ſee with aſtoniſhment, that thoſe who have loſt themſelves have had more lights and graces than were neceſſary to ſave them. Hence our

* Matth. v. 48. † Ibid. 44, 45.

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our charity ought to be univerſal, as to perſons, to places, to times, and to all ſorts of good things that are in our power; and when theſe fail us, we have always the reſource of a good will, of deſire, and of prayer.

To practiſe properly ſuch a charity, it is hardly to be imagined to what a degree we muſt every way reſtrain, deſpoil, and mortify ourſelves. For example: you have the abundant neceſſary; you have the ſuperfluous; you have all your conveniencies; and becauſe you beſtow ſome ſlight alms, without diminiſhing any thing of your luxury and ſumptuouſneſs, you are at eaſe, and flatter yourſelf that you are charitable. It is a groſs error. If there be a poor object, who is deſtitute of the neceſſary, and in behalf of whom you do not trench upon your ſuperfluous expences, upon your comforts, even upon the abundance, that you deem neceſſary with reſpect to you; you ſin againſt charity, and you will anſwer before God for having been ignorant of his indigence, of which you ought to have taken information. That which you owe to your birth, to your rank, to your ſtation, goes very much behind what you owe to the primary neceſſities of your neighbour. In like manner, though you may not be charged with the ſpiritual miniſtry, if from want of a good counſel, of a reprimand, of care and vigilance in regard to thoſe over

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whom you have inſpection; if from want of receiving from you inſtruction and good example, they offend God, they do not amend, they expoſe themſelves to ruin, and in fact loſe themſelves, you grievouſly wound charity; and you will be reſponſible for the ſoul of your neighbour. If your humour, your impatience, your haughtineſs is to him an occaſion of fall, his fall will be imputed to you. Nay more; even though your faults were to him an exerciſe of patience, and were conducive to his ſanctification, you will not be leſs culpable. I ſhall not purſue this detail, which is immenſe. But I am not afraid to advance, that charity is of a continual practice; and that we cannot be faithful in it, without tending to all the perfection of chriſtianity. What a well-ſupported attention is requiſite to deal prudently with our neighbour; to bear with him, to excuſe his faults, to accommodate ourſelves to his character, to prevent him, and to gueſs in ſome meaſure at what may oblige him! Upon how many occaſions muſt we not yield, and relent in our rights? How many things muſt we not ſuffer, and paſs over in ſilence? How many natural motions of ſelf-love, of ſenſibility, of repugnance, and of reſentment muſt we not ſtifle? and that to fulfil this one only part of the precept: *Bear the burdens of one another.* Under a certain relation, the practice of chriſtian

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tian mortification is the ſame with that of charity; and it is only by a continual death to ourſelves that we attain to the higheſt point of the love of our neighbour.

For there are degrees to infinity in the practice of this precept; or rather each degree is ſuſceptible of perfection to infinity. The firſt is to do to others all the good of which we are capable. The ſecond, to do it well; to do it opportunely; to do it with a juſt meaſure; and to join all that can render it more endearing or more uſeful to our neighbour; and whilſt we oblige ſome, never to diſoblige others. The third, to do good on every occaſion, whatever it may coſt us, and never to conſult in that regard our own intereſt, our delicacy, our natural inclinations, or averſions. The fourth, in ſhort, to do it through the moſt pure and excellent motives. What an ample ſubject of examination, for a ſoul that aſpires to the perfection of charity; and who is the chriſtian, who ought not to aſpire to it?

To love our neighbour in this manner, it is abſolutely neceſſary to conſider him in Jeſus Chriſt; to oblige in him the perſon of Jeſus Chriſt; to ſuffer from him in the view of Jeſus Chriſt; to have, in a word, always Jeſus Chriſt preſent to the mind and heart in all our connexions with our neighbour. It is alſo upon this account that Jeſus Chriſt in his goſpel every

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every where ſubſtitutes our neighbour for himſelf; and declares, that at the laſt judgment he ſhall hold as done to himſelf, to reward or to puniſh the good or the evil done to the leaſt of his. How difficult it is to raiſe ourſelves up at all times to ſo ſupernatural a view, and not frequently to conſider the man in the man! And yet without that, you never will love your neighbour as you ought. The man preſenting himſelf before you, with his faults, will ſhock you; will diſguſt you; will excite your contempt, or will leave you at leaſt in a cold indifference. You will think that you owe him nothing; on the contrary, that he is your debtor. Or if you oblige him, if you ſhew him attention, your friendſhip and attention will be purely human, upon which a refined and reflexed ſelf-love will find nouriſhment.

Who would not be frightened, O my Saviour, on conſidering the extent and the perfection of the duties of charity! But how much more am I affrighted, when I caſt my eyes on myſelf, and bring home thoſe duties to my own conduct! But what comforts me in ſome degree is, that I think I ſincerely deteſt all the ſins I have committed in this matter, and that I am reſolved to repair them by the moſt exact practice of this virtue. What comforts me ſtill more is, that thou art charity itſelf, and quite ready to pardon whomſoever that acknowledges himſelf

himſelf guilty. Whither could I go, unleſs it be to thee, to learn what charity is; to find in thy love for me, the motive and the model of my love for my neighbour; and to receive the ſuccours, without which my feeble will can do nothing? Penetrate me with thy ſentiments for my brethren, that are thine. I wiſh to love them, becauſe thou loveſt them, as thou loveſt them; that thereby I may deſerve to be eternally loved by thee. *Amen.*

TWELFTH

TWELFTH LESSON.

SELF-DENIAL.

THE ſaying in the goſpel the moſt harſh to man is this: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himſelf* *. Nature ſhudders at the ſound of theſe words; the mind recoils; the will revolts, and human *ſelf* reſiſts them with all its might. It is not to be wondered at, ſince by ſetting man againſt himſelf, it obliges him continually to war upon himſelf; and, in a word, to deſtroy himſelf, that he may ſubſtitute a new man for the old. What a morality! who can comprehend it? who can reliſh it? who can practiſe it?

Human philoſophy never taught a morality like this; it was beyond the reach of it. Either it granted all to the ſenſes, by eſtabliſhing wiſdom in a moderate enjoyment of pleaſures, by putting under calculation, and compenſating the one by the other of *voluptuouſneſs* and *pain*; or by aſcribing all to virtue, ſuch as that philoſophy underſtood it; which flattered, nouriſhed, and exalted the pride of man, by making him believe, that it depended on himſelf alone to be virtuous; and that for ſo great a work he ſtood not

* Matt. xvi. 24.

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not in need of the concurrence of the Deity. Jeſus Chriſt appears, after Epicurus and Zeno; and commands every one who means to be his diſciple, at once to renounce the pleaſures of the ſenſes, and the pride of reaſon; preſcribing the ſevereſt mortification, and the moſt profound humility. Thus does he confound the falſe wiſdom that was in concert with corrupt nature, or only invited man to become better, by rendering him more proud; and he exacts of him the completeſt reformation, with reſpect to the two ſubſtances of which he is compoſed, without having it in his power to applaud himſelf for it, as if it were a work of his own. He admits of no temperament in this total abnegation. No medium, does he ſay; either deny yourſelf, or I deny you; it is only upon this condition that you can belong to me. Once more, what a ſentence! and who can bear it!

Nevertheleſs it is a God-Man; it is the increated Wiſdom who ſpeaks in this manner; he deſcended upon earth to teach us the way to happineſs; and he ſhews us no other than that of ſelf-denial. He walked in it the firſt; and though there was nothing in himſelf that could be reformed, he renounced in all things his judgment and will. He invites us, to whom this reformation is neceſſary, to follow him, if we mean to attain to the ſame term of eternal felicity.

A language

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A language like this, unheard of before, in the mouth of Jeſus Chriſt, deſerves, moſt undoubtedly, all our attention. We muſt dive into it; not to examine it, but to inſtruct ourſelves, and to agree that it is worthy of the divine Legiſlator who pronounced it. What then is it to deny one's ſelf? Why muſt we deny ourſelves? To what paſs muſt we deny ourſelves? What are the fruits of this denial? what will be its reward? ſo many queſtions are theſe, into which a chriſtian cannot penetrate enough.

What is it to deny one's ſelf, and what are we to underſtand by that? To form a juſt notion of it, let us enter as far as we can into the nature of man. He is compoſed of two ſubſtances; the ſoul and the body: the ſoul governs; the body is the inſtrument and the executor of the will of the ſoul. The union of theſe two ſubſtances form the *ſelf*; it is the ſoul that pronounces this *ſelf*; but it does not pronounce it for itſelf alone, it alſo compriſes the body, that is cloſely united with it. To deny one's ſelf, does not mean that the ſoul is to ſeparate itſelf from its body; much leſs that it is to ſeparate itſelf from itſelf. This latter ſeparation is abſurd, and contradictory; no being can ſeparate itſelf from itſelf. The other is poſſible; but it would be contrary to the inſtitution of the Creator,

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Creator, who does not allow us to ſeparate what he has joined.

To deny one's ſelf, cannot even be to combat in one's ſelf invincible propenſities, that precede all uſe of reaſon, and that are a neceſſary conſequence of our exiſtence. I neceſſarily love my body; I am neceſſitated to provide for its preſervation and its wants; if under certain caſes I ſacrifice my life, it can only be through views of a ſuperior order; and to deprive myſelf of it through deſpair, would be an act of folly. My ſoul loves itſelf, as neceſſarily, as it knows itſelf; becauſe it loves itſelf, it wiſhes its happineſs, which is the object of all its deſires, the drift of all its ſteps and projects; in a word, its ultimate end, which it has not the power to renounce.

I cannot therefore practiſe ſelf-denial but with regard to the motions, the appetites, the thoughts, and the affections that are ſubject to free will: and in all that I muſt diſcern what is conformable or contrary to my reaſonable nature, to its dignity, to its deſtination, and to a profound inſtinct that inſpires me with a reſpect and a love for moral order. I have wants; I muſt ſatify them, when no eſſential reaſon puts an obſtacle to it. But I have deſires that go beyond thoſe wants: theſe I muſt renounce; I have lawful affections; but for them to be juſt and approved by God, they muſt be in order;

order; I muſt keep them in ſubjection, and renounce whatſoever may ſwerve from it. I have other affections that prompt me to what is forbidden, either in itſelf, or on account of circumſtances: I never muſt yield to them. I have paſſions: but by their nature they muſt be ſubject to ſound reaſon; and when reaſon condemns them, either in their object or in their exceſs, they muſt be repreſſed. My ſenſes have a uſe that is neceſſary or lawful; but they may have one that is dangerous, that would irritate my paſſions, that would produce in me unlawful deſires; in this reſpect I muſt mortify them. With much greater reaſon all this is to be ſaid of the faculties of the ſoul, of the imagination, of the memory, of the underſtanding, and of the will. My reaſon, inſtructed and guided by religion, muſt regulate the uſe of them, and interdict them whatever might lead me to vice, or withdraw me from virtue. This is to renounce, not thoſe faculties themſelves, but the images, the remembrances, the reaſonings, the wiſhes, either bad or frivolous and uſeleſs, or miſplaced or unſeaſonable. I owe to myſelf a certain eſteem, on account of the dignity of my nature; but if this eſteem paſſes the juſt bounds, it degenerates into pride; if it reſts on an unſolid ground, it degenerates into vanity; and I muſt renounce that pride and that vanity. I cannot help loving myſelf; but that love

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love becomes unreaſonable, and is not in order, when in contempt of God and of my neighbour, it preſſes me to bring every thing home to myſelf; I then muſt renounce it, and force it to keep itſelf within its proper limits. I am at liberty to ſeek my happineſs in every thing: in that I do nothing but what is conformable to my intelligent nature, and to the primary deſigns of the Creator. But whether through the error of my mind, or the depravity of my heart, I ſeek that happineſs where it is not, and where it cannot be, I ſeek it at the expence of the happineſs of my neighbour, to which my own ought not to be hurtful; and to attain it, I employ unjuſt means. It is clear, that upon finding out the error, that depravity, that injuſtice, I am obliged to renounce them, and to reform what is vain and reprehenſible in the purſuit of my happineſs. Such are the principal objects about which the goſpel ſubjects me to the laws of ſelf-denial.

But why muſt I deny myſelf in this manner? becauſe without that I debaſe, I degrade, I pervert my reaſonable nature; I am no longer nor man, nor chriſtian. The heathens were acquainted with the four virtues of prudence, juſtice, fortitude, and temperance, of which they made the baſe of their morality. And what is prudence, but a virtue that teaches me to diſtinguiſh the things that I ought, or may lawfully

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lawfully do, from thoſe from which I ought to abſtain? Can I be juſt, can I be ſtrong, can I be temperate, unleſs I deny myſelf, as it were, at every inſtant? and can I poſſeſs the habit of any virtue, unleſs I acquire the habit of ſelf-denial? Every one knows the two words to which Epictetus reduced his doctrine, *abſtain and ſuffer*. What means abſtain, unleſs it be to deny one's ſelf? And what elſe is patience, but a continual ſelf-denial? That which chriſtianity adds to theſe precepts, drawn from ſound reaſon, is only a more extenſive, and a more perfect ſelf-denial.

Is then my nature eſſentially bad, and why has God made it ſuch, as to be obliged inceſſantly to renounce it? This is the problem which paganiſm never could reſolve, ever ſince it had loſt the traces of the primitive revelation. No; your nature is not eſſentially bad; and that which you hold from God is not what you are commanded to renounce. But man is no longer ſuch as he came out of the hands of the Creator; and ſin has wholly vitiated him and all his faculties. Even in his firſt ſtate of innocence, as he was defectible, in caſe he had been tried by temptation, as in fact he was, he had to make to himſelf ſome reſiſtance; he had to practiſe ſome denial, in order to remain faithful to the obedience he owed to his Maker. For in ſhort he only became guilty, for having yielded

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yielded to that inexplicable principle of defectibility, which every creature contains within itſelf, and for having given hold to the ſuggeſtions of the tempter. He was proud, and wiſhed to equal God. He was curious, and wanted to acquire a knowledge of good and evil, which was interdicted him. He reaſoned on the prohibition that God gave him, as if it had been the effect of the envy which God bore him, and of the fear leſt he ſhould become quite ſimilar to him. He looked with too much complacency on the forbidden fruit, and ſuffered himſelf to be tempted by its beauty, and by the taſte he expected from it. To ſay all at once, he liſtened to the devil; he liſtened to himſelf, whilſt he ought only to have liſtened to God; he ought to have denied himſelf in all thoſe points, and he would not have ſinned.

But ſince his fall, being wounded in all the parts of his nature, he is obliged to practiſe many other ſelf-denials, not for him to heal himſelf, but that grace may heal him and maintain him in health. He is all darkneſs in mind; and his whole tendency is to be led aſtray by his falſe notions, as well as his vain reaſonings. He therefore muſt be inceſſantly diffident of his own pretended lights; he muſt renounce them, and reſt himſelf only upon thoſe which come to him from God, and which he ought humbly

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to implore. His will is all repugnance to good, and all propenſity to evil. He muſt force that repugnance, he muſt ſtruggle againſt that propenſity; he muſt hate, he muſt weaken, he muſt deſtroy in himſelf thoſe two enemies, not by his own ſtrength, for he has none, but by the ſtrength that grace communicates to him; that is to ſay, the divine attractive that ſpurs him on to good, and withdraws him from evil. Concupiſcence continually attracts him towards ſenſible objects, and ſolicits him to enjoy them; his ſenſes are always open to receive their impreſſions; his fleſh often makes him experience humbling rebellions, to which he is expoſed to conſent; the body only tends to enſlave the ſoul, and to render it the miniſter of its pleaſures. Unleſs he combats this unrelenting concupiſcence, unleſs he captivates his ſenſes that are reſtleſs, fickle, curious, and inſatiable of new objects; unleſs he mortifies his rebellious fleſh, that only wants to be flattered, and is greedy of voluptuous ſenſations; unleſs he keeps the body in the dependance of the ſoul, from which it ever endeavours to withdraw itſelf; he forgets God, and forgets himſelf; he becomes brute, and worſe than the brute, by employing his reaſon in ſatisfying and in juſtifying his groſs appetites. He is therefore under the neceſſity of denying himſelf, unleſs he means to renounce God, his principle,

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principle, and his end; to renounce his high deſtination; to renounce even his preſent happineſs; to renounce his quality of rational being; to be the ſport of his errors and paſſions; to be the ſlave of his body and of external objects; to live in inquietude, in agitation, in tedioufneſs, in diſguſt, and in continual torment.

Were he alone in the world, he would have to deny himſelf thus, for the ſake of his real intereſt; but he is born, and lives in ſociety; and ſociety cannot peaceably ſubſiſt, if each one of the members that compoſe it, beginning from the chiefs to the laſt of ſubjects and citizens, do not prefer the general welfare before their own. How many new ſelf-denials, how many ſacrifices muſt be made, if we be unwilling to introduce among men all ſorts of diſorders and crimes; to be always in fears and alarms for our ſafety; to know no other right than force, that paſſes at every moment from one hand to another; to fall a victim to the fraud and violence of others; and, together with the ruin of the body of ſociety, to bring on the ruin of every individual! God, who will have concord, union, and peace to reign in all governments, was therefore to command the ſovereigns and the people, all thoſe renouncements that this end requires, he was to interdict them every deſire, every project, every action

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action that is hurtful to public order, and was to fetter by his prohibitions ſelf-love, the cauſe of all the evils that have hitherto ravaged the world. Obſerve that I only ſpeak of what is neceſſary to prevent crimes. We muſt carry ſelf-denial much farther, in order to practiſe thoſe virtues that render ſociety convenient, comfortable, amiable, and beneficial in every particular; ſo that, as much as can be, in the public welfare, each one may find his own private advantage.

That which is true in the great ſociety of men, is not leſs ſo in the little one; I mean the family. If huſband and wife, if parents and children, if brothers and ſiſters, if maſters and ſervants do not freely and willingly ſubmit themſelves to the denial that Jeſus Chriſt has commanded, it is impoſſible that domeſtic peace ſhould ſubſiſt; or that innocence, ſubordination, love, confidence, and mutual good offices ſhould be maintained, and every houſe will become, or at every inſtant may become, a hell for thoſe who dwell in it. In this point, human motives alone never will ſupply the deficiency of the goſpel; and no family will be found perfectly and conſtantly united, where the principles of the chriſtian morality are not obſerved. I appeal to experience; and conclude that, in whatſoever light you conſider man, whether with a reference to God, to his neighbour, or to himſelf;

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ſelf; alone, in family, in ſociety, ſelf-denial is indiſpenſible.

You detractors of the goſpel, (for it is eſpecially in this particular that it diſpleaſes you) blame now, if you dare, in Jeſus Chriſt, a leſſon which you admire in a Seneca, in a Mark Aurelius; a leſſon which he has only perfected, of which he has ſet us the example, and the practice of which his merits and grace have rendered poſſible. The elogies, which in this point you laviſhly beſtow on profane ſages, tell againſt you, and are your condemnation. You praiſe them at free coſt, as you acquit yourſelves with them with a ſterile admiration that obliges you to nothing. Whereas in ſpite of you, you feel in the doctrine of Jeſus Chriſt an authority that ſubjugates, judges, and condemns you; and upon this account you riſe up againſt it, you cenſure and blaſpheme it.

But to what paſs are we to deny ourſelves? To ſuch paſs as is neceſſary perfectly to fulfil the law of God: a chriſtian can have no doubt about that. Now the law of God cannot be perfectly obſerved, unleſs that denial be univerſal, abſolute, and continual. If it be not univerſal, if you do not hate, if you do not purſue whatever is vicious in your nature, you no longer can anſwer for yourſelf; nor can you know how far an indulgence, in any one point, may hurry you away. You lop off the branches

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of a vice, but you ſuffer the roots to remain; it will ſhoot out new branches, which at laſt you will tire in lopping, and will be the cauſe of your ruin. In vain do you hold back the hand, if you hold not back the deſire; ſooner or later the deſire will force the hand. It is the firſt thought, the firſt motion, that you muſt repreſs, as ſoon as you perceive it, and as ſoon as God inſpires you to do it. If you neglect the thought, you will delight in it, and the action will ſoon follow; that action reiterated, will lead to a habit, and one evil will bring on a greater. What is a look? nothing in appearance. One only is ſufficient, even tranſient and very rapid; which you do not renounce, to kindle a violent paſſion, of which you no longer will be maſter, and which will carry you to the greateſt exceſs. A look rendered David adulterer and murderer; and without the admonition of a prophet, he would not have acknowledged it. What is a ſmall illicit gain? with that, great rapines almoſt always begin. A word, a geſture, a wilful want of attention, is often the ſource of the moſt violent hatreds, and the moſt terrible revenges. Every evil in its origin is but a ſpark, which would be of no conſequence, were it carefully extinguiſhed: aſſiſtance comes too late, when it has produced a vaſt conflagration. All the world is well acquainted with that. There is no one who, at the

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the birth of a paſſion, meant to go as far as it poſſibly could lead; and yet we do not take any meaſures to renounce the firſt approach, and we judge that law too ſevere that exacts it.

There is the ſame danger, if ſelf-denial be not abſolute, if you put it under conditions, reſtrictions, and reſerves. Nature will always gain its cauſe, when you begin to diſpute with it about the more or leſs, and allow it to expoſe its reaſons. It is nothing, will it ſay, that will be of no conſequence, I will ſtop there. Do not rely upon that; or rather be aſſured of the contrary. You will hardly have granted what it craves, before it will propoſe to you ſomething new, which you will find more difficult to refuſe. To ſtate ſelf-denial at certain bounds, is a thing impracticable. You will flatter yourſelf in vain with the ſtopping at thoſe bounds; you neither will be able nor willing to do it. The reſerve you have put, the reſtriction you have made, will weaken you in the very points in which you think yourſelf the firmeſt; and in a ſhort time you will even fail on the moſt important occaſions.

Self-denial muſt be continual; that is, that there is not one inſtant in life, in which you ſhould not be on your guard, in order to reſiſt the firſt impulſes of nature. This always acts againſt grace; and you muſt oppoſe to it a ſtill ſtronger action: for to ſtand on a balance with

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it is quite a chimera. The moment in which your effort ſhall leſſen, and your vigilance relax, will be the moment of your fall. Attentive to profit by the leaſt advantage, nature will ſurpriſe you; and if it once gets the maſtery, it will be more difficult to ſubdue it again. Let us therefore embrace ſelf-denial in its full extent; let us take the reſolution of combating ourſelves in every thing, until death. Let us be attentive to what I am going to ſay; it is only at that moment that this practice will ſeem pleaſing to us: it is always harſh to all who embrace it but in part; of the truth of this, the courageous ſouls on the one hand, and the ſlothful on the other, give full teſtimony. I know, that in ſpite of our good reſolutions, we ſtill ſhall be liable to a good many weakneſſes; but if our will be ſincere, God will be indulgent to us; he himſelf will lift us up, ſupport us, and grant us perſeverance.

We ſhall reap the fruits of ſelf-denial, in proportion as we ſhall practice it: thoſe fruits are innumerable; I ſhall only bring forward the chief. Order will reign within us; reaſon will be ſubmiſſive to God; the paſſions to reaſon; the ſenſes and the fleſh to the mind. We ſhall gradually attain to the perfect liberty of the children of God; we ſhall have an abſolute command over ourſelves, with ſtrength to check every diſorderly motion in its birth, and to reſiſt

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the firſt ſuggeſtions of the devil. We ſhall have alſo the incomparable advantage of ſinning no more grievouſly, nor with deliberation; but lightly, and through inadvertence, through ſurpriſe, and mere frailty; ſo that our faults, which will be attended with no bad conſequence, will only ſerve to keep us in humility, and in a diffidence of ourſelves. We ſhall enjoy a ſolid and laſting peace: for in proportion as we advance in the practice of ſelf-denial, the combats become leſs frequent, leſs ſtrong, and of courſe leſs painful; and the victories will coſt at laſt almoſt no kind of effort. The preſence of God, the facility of praying, the reliſh for heavenly things accompany that peace. The more we deny ourſelves for God, the more does he communicate himſelf, becauſe he finds in us a greater purity of heart. As to our neighbour, it is by ſelf-denial that we gain his eſteem and affection; we live upon ſo much the better terms with every one, as we are dead to ourſelves, and feel much leſs livelily what we may have occaſion to ſuffer from others. With regard to the inevitable evils of life, of what kind ſoever they may be, ſelf-denial raiſes us above them, and teaches us to turn them to profit.

Such are the advantages we draw from it in this world: but what will be its reward in eternity! If heaven be aſſured to thoſe who die in the ſtate of grace; if the ſmalleſt degree of the glory

glory and of the happineſs of the loweſt of the elect, ſurpaſſes, without compariſon, all that the mind can conceive, and the heart deſire, to what glory, to what happineſs will thoſe ſouls be raiſed, who have denied themſelves upon earth? If a cup of cold water given to a poor object will have its reward, how much greater will the reward be of an act of ſelf-denial? Whilſt charity towards the wretched is ſo pleaſing, and ſelf-denial ſo painful, what difference therefore will not God make between thoſe two actions; he who is the juſt Appraiſer, and the magnificent Rewarder! And what will he not beſtow on an habitual ſelf-denial, followed up to the ſmalleſt and the moſt imperceptible niceties, even to the deſtruction of the human ſelf, at leaſt in deſire! Let us rely upon God; he will give himſelf to us in exact proportion, as we ſhall have given ourſelves to him by ſelf-denial. I ſtop here; whatever more I might ſay for the unfolding of this idea only, would weaken it.

O my God, what a change has ſuddenly come upon me! I dreaded ſelf-denial, as the ſevereſt precept of the goſpel; I taxed it almoſt of tyranny: and now I find it infinitely juſt and reaſonable; I love and deſire it; I mean to devote myſelf to the practice of it, even for the comfort of my life. How blind have I hitherto been! how little did I know my real

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real intereſt, when I thought that ſelf-denial was oppoſite to my happineſs! on the contrary, it is the only road that leads to it. Grant, O Lord, that I may always remain invincibly perſuaded of this truth; and may it be henceforward the baſe and the rule of my conduct. I muſt deny myſelf, in order to be happy in this life and the next. As much, therefore, as I wiſh to be happy, ſo much muſt I wiſh to deny myſelf. I take this reſolution, O Lord; I ſet my hand to work under the direction of thy grace. Aſſiſt me, ſupport me, give me ſtrength to perſevere in it to the end. *Amen.*

THIRTEENTH

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THIRTEENTH LESSON.

THE EIGHT BEATITUDES.

JESUS CHRIST, from the mountain where he was ſeated, opens to a long diſcourſe which he makes to the people, by declaring who thoſe are whom he holds to be happy, and in fact are ſo. Let us give ear to this diſcourſe, which is addreſſed to us all; there is nothing ſo intereſting to us as the beginning of it; and he who ſpeaks, is the only one who deſerves our whole belief. On the moſt important matter of morality, with a divine authority he explains himſelf clearly, ſimply, in a few words, without diſplay of principles and of reaſonings.

Philoſophers at all times have reaſoned upon happineſs; but all of them failed in their inveſtigations. Various as well as vain were their ſyſtems, groundleſs in themſelves, and unattainable in practice, degenerating into diſputes among the wits in the ſchools, and the men of letters in their cloſet, without ever becoming any rule of life, either for the learned or ignorant. This was becauſe two things were wanting to them; a light to convince, and an authority to perſuade. Jeſus Chriſt alone, in

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in quality of the ſupreme reaſon, has joined to the moſt glaring light the moſt cogent authority. From hence flow the ſimplicity and the force of his diſcourſe; it enlightens and effects; it captivates the mind, and wins the heart.

In chriſtianity itſelf, the world has its ideas on happineſs: for who is not philoſopher in this matter? and theſe ideas are directly oppoſite to thoſe of Jeſus Chriſt. To judge with ſureneſs on what ſide the truth is to be found, it is ſufficient to pay attention to the principles which Jeſus Chriſt and the world follow, in their eſtimation of happineſs. The world conſiders happineſs ſolely with a reference to the preſent life, and makes it conſiſt in the enjoyment of ſenſible objects. Jeſus Chriſt conſiders it chiefly with a reference to the life to come, and eſtabliſhes it here below in the uſe of the means that lead to eternal felicity. Moreover, without excluding from this tranſitory life all kind of happineſs, he places it in an intimate peace of the heart, that is independent of what the ſoul experiences on account of the body and of external objects. Without going any further, and without conſulting experience, which here ſovereignly decides, which of the two reaſons beſt, of him who conſtitutes the happineſs of a being that is intelligent, free, capable of virtue and of vice, evidently deſtined to immortality

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in a fixed, aſſured, and eternal ſtate; or of him who annexes the happineſs of ſuch a being to a ſtate that is changeable, uncertain, of a very ſhort duration, and on which there can be no dependance? Of him who places it in the poſſeſſion of a good, that is infinitely above man, the knowledge of which will raviſh his mind with admiration, and the love of which will fill his heart with an ineffable joy; or of him who places it in the poſſeſſion of objects that are greatly inferior to man, that cannot ſatisfy his immenſe deſire of knowing and of loving? Of him who eſtabliſhes the ſeat of happineſs in the very centre of the ſoul, from whence it diffuſes itſelf over all its faculties, and over the body that is united with it, as far as it is capable of it; or of him who makes it reſide in the imagination, in that which in the ſoul is ſenſitive, and by which it holds by the body, ſo as to depend upon its organs, and on the goodneſs of its conſtitution? Of him, in ſhort, who gives us in the peace of the heart, a pledge of the happineſs to come; or of him who keeps the heart always reſtleſs, always famiſhed, and offers it nothing that contents it? Can we poſſibly heſitate? and muſt we not neceſſarily agree, that on the ſide of Jeſus Chriſt there is all truth and wiſdom to be found; whereas on the part of the world, all is falſe-

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hood and folly. After this general reaſoning, which is evident and without reply to an upright ſoul; let us come to the explication of each beatitude, and let us put the maxims of the world in parallel with thoſe of Jeſus Chriſt.

FIRST BEATITUDE.

Bleſſed, ſays our Lord, *are the poor in ſpirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven* *. The poor in ſpirit, that is to ſay, in heart and affection, are thoſe who, if they poſſeſs riches, are not attached to them, and make a rational uſe of them; or if they do not poſſeſs them, do not deſire them, and are content with the neceſſary for their ſubſiſtence. Theſe two ſorts of poor are very rare; there are few rich, whoſe heart is not attached to riches; there are few poor, who do not deſire to be rich, and whom that deſire does not engage to employ illicit means to become ſo.

In viewing things only philoſophically, the poor of whom Jeſus Chriſt ſpeaks, are they not truly happy? The firſt have indeed riches, but they are not tormented by them; they are the maſters of them, but are no ways ſlaves to them; they poſſeſs them, but are not poſſeſſed by

* Matt. v. 3. et ſeq.

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by them. In taking proper pains to preſerve their fortunes, or even to better it, they are free from ſolicitudes; and the loſſes they meet with do not afflict them. In other reſpects, they enter into no law-ſuits, but through neceſſity; they are guilty of no injuſtices: they are liberal and benevolent; ready at all times to relieve the needy, and are leſs rich for themſelves than for others. Thus do they raiſe themſelves above the envenomed ſhafts of envy; from their readineſs to oblige, they procure themſelves friends; they have the bleſſings of the poor, and whilſt they themſelves are happy, they conſtitute the happineſs of all who are about them.

The ſecond have not the incumbrances that unavoidably attend great poſſeſſions, nor conſiderable loſſes to ſuſtain or to apprehend. They are ſtrangers to the torment of ſuperfluous deſires; if they poſſeſs little, that little ſuffices them. A nouriſhment that is frugal and friendly to health, is the fruit of their labour; and in ſatisfying the firſt wants of nature, they taſte an innocent pleaſure, which the rich man does not find in the abundance and in the conveniencies of life. In the eſtimation of the pagan ſages, this mediocrity is preferable to opulency; and the portrait they give of it in their writings, how charming ſoever it may be, falls ſhort of the reality. This is what the world itſelf, upon the

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the ſmalleſt reflection, muſt agree to; and cannot refuſe the title of happy to thoſe who make a good uſe of riches, or to thoſe who know how to live without them.

But their happineſs is by far greater, when we conſider the thing in a chriſtian light. The heart of both the one and the other being diſengaged from the good things of the earth, wholly bends itſelf towards thoſe that are above; it anticipates the fruition of them, and being grounded on the promiſes of Jeſus Chriſt, it knows that the kingdom of heaven is enſured to it, provided it continues diſengaged. How great is the happineſs of chriſtian hope, which cannot be wanting to us but through our own fault, as on the part of God it reſts on an unſhaken baſis! That heavenly and everlaſting kingdom belongs to me; may the rich who is poor in ſpirit ſay to himſelf, as well as the poor who is content with his poverty; it belongs to me, I have the expreſs word for it of Jeſus Chriſt, whoſe kingdom it is; for me to be deprived of it, I muſt be willing to loſe it; and God forbid that I ever ſhould conceive ſo fatal a deſign: I hope that his goodneſs will preſerve me from it: and that I never ſhall be ſo infatuated as to ſacrifice an eternal good, to the affection of periſhable things. A chriſtian who thinks in this manner, who feeds upon ſuch a pleaſing hope, who lives ſo as not to make it void, muſt

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he not be happy with a ſupernatural happineſs, without ſpeaking of the other kind of happineſs, which human wiſdom does not deny him?

Still more happy, in every ſenſe of the word, than either the one or the other, are the voluntary poor, who practiſing the counſel of Jeſus Chriſt, in order to walk more freely in his footſteps, have ſtript themſelves of all, and have vowed to poſſeſs nothing upon the earth. They have no care either to acquire or preſerve; the houſe they dwell in furniſhes them with what is neceſſary; one or two perſons have the charge of providing for the wants of all. In this reſpect, there is a perfect equality amongſt them; and being ſtrangers to the mine and the thine, there is nothing to prevent them from having but one heart and one ſoul, like the primitive chriſtians of Jeruſalem. They have full liberty to attend to heavenly things, and to employ themſelves in the ſpiritual or temporal welfare of their neighbour. If they poſſeſs the ſpirit of their ſtate, and are faithful to their calling, they are angels upon earth, and already ſhare in the happineſs of the bleſſed in heaven, as they only think of God, and live and labour only for him. If the world thinks them wretched, it is becauſe it knows them not, and becauſe their kind of happineſs is beyond its reach.

Happy

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Happy are the rich, ſays the worldling: for the good things of the earth are theirs. Although this happineſs were real, it could only belong to a ſmall number; and this already is an evident proof that it is not a real one. For the proper happineſs of man ſhould be ſuch, as that every man may attain to it; if the major part be excluded from it, it no longer is the happineſs of man, but that of birth, of condition, or of induſtry. Happy are the rich! But in what are they happy? Is it becauſe they fully ſatisfy the wants of nature? but to do that, it is not neceſſary to be rich; and to ſupply the wants of the body is not a happineſs for the ſoul; it is only a privation of ſuffering, or at moſt a phyſical well-being, that enables the ſoul to acquit itſelf of the functions which it cannot exerciſe without the body. But the ſoul has its happineſs apart, of an order that is much more elevated, which all the riches of the univerſe never can procure. Is it becauſe they abound in the conveniencies of life? But theſe conveniencies, without which moſt men very comfortably live, are in fact more imaginary than real wants; and to increaſe our wants, which may be done almoſt to infinity, is only to increaſe our miſery and ſlavery. And therefore the rich are more dependent on and are greater ſlaves to their bodies than the poor, and conſequently in that reſpect they are more to be pitied.

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pitied. Is it becauſe riches afford the means of enjoying every pleaſure? But the pleaſures of the ſenſes, which are bought by weight of gold, are the happineſs of the animal, (if, however, the animal be ſuſceptible of happineſs) and no ways the happineſs of man. Thoſe pleaſures do not ſatisfy his hunger, but increaſe it; the more he indulges in them, the more do they pall upon him, and to be glutted with them, and to be a burden to one's ſelf, is equivalently the ſame.

Add to this, that the diſorder and the exceſs of them are followed by ſo many fatal conſequences both for ſoul and body, that one muſt be wholly unreaſonable to place his happineſs in voluptuous ſenſations. All the ſages of antiquity were of this opinion, and Plato has demonſtrated it. This, however, is but the fair ſide of riches.

Now if we conſider them under the other aſpect, with reſpect to the anxieties it coſts to amaſs or to keep them; to the lawſuits they occaſion; to the endleſs deſires they excite; to the habitual fear of loſing them, by a thouſand accidents, which often the beſt precautions cannot guard againſt; to the certainty of being one day deſpoiled of them by death; to the remorſes of conſcience ariſing from an unjuſt poſſeſſion; to the neceſſity of reſtoring, which it is ſo painful to ſubmit to; to the terrors of another

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ther life that haunt a wicked rich man who ſtill retains a ſpark of religion; to the public hatred, that by his hard-heartedneſs and inſenſibility he draws upon himſelf; to the envy that his ſloth, effeminacy, and pride excites in his inferiors; to all the evils, in a word, that attend and reſult from great fortunes; to the mean and debaſing vices that the love of money begets in a man; to the dangers of every kind with which opulence is threatened; we ſhall readily agree, that riches, far from rendering man happy, are the moſt conducive to his miſery.

As to the belief and the practice of religion, both which are neceſſary to ſecure the happineſs of a chriſtian in another life, who is ignorant that in this light Jeſus Chriſt has anathematized the rich? Who is ignorant that piety is incompatible with the love of riches, and that it is a very rare thing to poſſeſs them and not to love them? It is therefore averred, that they are at once hurtful to the happineſs of man and of the chriſtian; and that in every point of view, happy are the poor in ſpirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; becauſe they have incomparably leſs to ſuffer upon earth, and becauſe all things concur to ſooth the pains that are inevitable in life.

St. Auſtin, in his expoſition of the ſermon on the mountain, underſtands by the poor in ſpirit,

ſpirit, thoſe who are humble, whoſe mind and heart are free from all ſwelling. In explaining the words of Jeſus Chriſt in this ſenſe, who can doubt but the humble are happy in compariſon with the proud? Is there a more cruel torment of the ſoul than that of pride? On the contrary, is there a more beatifying virtue than humility? I ſhall not at preſent ſay more on this ſubject, that I may avoid uniting many things under one title.

SECOND BEATITUDE.

The ſecond beatitude is: *Bleſſed are the meek; for they ſhall poſſeſs the land.* The meekneſs of which our Saviour ſpeaks here, is not preciſely that of the character with which we are born, and which may be improved by education. This is undoubtedly a pleaſing quality of the ſoul, and affords the greateſt comfort in the commerce of life; every one wiſhes to live with a meek character, eſpecially if it do not degenerate into ſoftneſs and inſipidity. The meekneſs ſpoken of in the goſpel, is a ſupernatural virtue, founded on the love of God and of our neighbour, and acquired with the help of grace, by continual victories over ourſelves. Thoſe who are meek through character, are commonly leſs capable of this virtue than others who

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who are more lively and impatient; becauſe natural meekneſs is generally joined to weakneſs, that does not allow the ſoul to uſe a certain violence with itſelf when the occaſion offers. Such a one ſeems meek, he yields, he endures, becauſe he wants power to reſiſt, and to repel what diſpleaſes. Supernatural meekneſs conſiſts in ſupporting the faults of our neighbour, all injuries, injuſtices, and other ill-treatments, without irritation and impatience, in not breaking out into murmurs and complaints, in retaining no bitterneſs nor rancour, and in ſincerely forgiving.

Meek ſouls *ſhall poſſeſs the land.* They will inherit that land of the living, from whence the death of both ſoul and body is for ever baniſhed. It will be their portion; becauſe chriſtian meekneſs does not go without the retinue of other virtues; and becauſe it cannot be conſtantly practiſed in its full extent, unleſs grace reigns in the heart. In caſe it ſhould happen that one who is meek ſhould fall into any grievous fault: God, to whom meekneſs is infinitely pleaſing, would ſoon go to his aſſiſtance; he would raiſe him up, and would not permit him to die in ſin. It was in this confidence that the Pſalmiſt ſaid to God: *O Lord, remember David, and all his meekneſs* *. Eſſential happineſs, therefore, is inſured

* Pſal. cxxxi.

fured to him, which is ſufficient to verify the words of Jeſus Chriſt.

But let us not ſtop here; and let us ſee if he, who is meek through virtue, does not enjoy the happineſs that appertains to this life. It is not in our power to hinder our neighbour from having faults, which are often very inconvenient; neither can we correct, and ſometimes we cannot admoniſh him. And yet we have to live with this neighbour. It is a father, a mother, a huſband, a brother, a ſiſter, a maſter, a miſtreſs, children, and even ſervants and other people, with whom, through various reaſons and intereſts, we are linked. How is it poſſible to be happy in ſuch a ſituation, which is daily, which ſometimes laſts for life, and in which the occaſions of being impatient are continual, unleſs the virtue of meekneſs come to our aſſiſtance? We ſuffer, it is true, in the beginning; but, by dint of repreſſing of ourſelves, we attain no longer to feel within us contrarieties nor rebellions; at laſt we hardly perceive the ſlighteſt emotion; we poſſeſs an habitual peace, which no turbulence nor buſtle, no wrangling or quarrelling can diſturb. Is not this a happineſs?

Who is not expoſed to evil proceedings, to injuries, to injuſtices of every kind? Not to be ſo, we muſt have no dealings, no connexions

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nexions with any one. If any one offends me, uſes me ill, or robs me of my property; if I am deſtitute of meekneſs, what will become of me? on the contrary, if I am meek, I ſhall be patient, I ſhall freely forgive, I ſhall always be ready to come to an accommodation, for the ſake of peace. Is not this alſo an happineſs? Is he more ſo, who experiences nothing of the kind? he is not; for though he be exteriorly more at reſt, he has not the advantage of practiſing the moſt comforting of virtues, and of feeling the ſweets of it; he is alſo deprived of thoſe graces with which God amply rewards whatever violence we uſe with ourſelves. Peace of mind is the only bleſſing of life; by means of meekneſs we ſhall always enjoy it; without meekneſs we never can enjoy it; there is nothing more evident.

Beſides, is there a more efficacious way to win every heart? And to quote an example, which every one is acquainted with; was it not by his incomparable meekneſs that St Francis of Sales was, of his age, the moſt amiable, and the moſt beloved? *Happy*, therefore, *are the meek, for they ſhall poſſeſs the land of the living*; their heart will always dwell in peace; they will maintain harmony with their neighbour, and will be equally cheriſhed both by God and men.

The world dares not ſay, Happy are thoſe who are not meek; who put up with nothing; who

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who forgive nothing; it too clearly ſees the falſehood and abſurdity of ſuch a language: but it ſays that we muſt not be ſo indulgent to the faults of our neighbour; that it is proper, now and then to make him ſenſible of them, provided we exceed not the bounds of civility and politeneſs; that we ſhould make ourſelves reſpected and feared, and not ſuffer ourſelves to be trampled under foot; that we muſt repel an injury, ſo as not to be expoſed to another; that we muſt ſtand up for our rights, and allow no one to invade them. Such are the maxims of the world, that are very oppoſite to Chriſtian meekneſs, and which, in practice, are but too punctually followed.

But let it be its own judge. Do theſe diſpoſitions procure happineſs? As to the capital point, which is the happineſs of another life, it is manifeſt, that to make thoſe maxims the rule of one's conduct, is to renounce, or very nearly to renounce it; becauſe it is impoſſible that to be haughty with our neighbour and intolerant of his faults, to be jealous of our rights, and too keenly to reſent injuries, ſhould not lead to conſiderable faults, and even to exceſſes; and becauſe this kind of ſin is very difficultly repented of. The man, therefore, who is an enemy to chriſtian meekneſs, always loſes himſelf irremediably.

But

But does he at leaſt ſecure to himſelf the happineſs of the preſent life? Not at all. Enter thoſe roofs, where this virtue is neither known nor practiſed; and ſee whether the huſband and wife, the father, the mother, and the children, the brothers and ſiſters, the maſter and the ſervants contribute to their mutual happineſs. Politeneſs, intereſt, and fear, ſometimes ſave appearances; but inwardly they feel the more. What repoſe does the haughty, proud, vindictive man enjoy, who cannot put up with the ſhadow of an offence? he may not, perhaps, be the aggreſſor; but is always on the defenſive; at the leaſt word, his repartee is in readineſs; unleſs you yield, unleſs you apologiſe, he is reſolved to go to the greateſt lengths. What does he inwardly feel? what agitation! what tranſports! what fury! he loſes his appetite and ſleep, and never will be at reſt, until he has had his revenge, and obtained ſatisfaction. Perhaps, alſo, he never will forgive; that is to ſay, he will keep in his heart a poiſon that will be the torment of his life. He will ſtill be worſe, if, with the deſire of revenge, he has not the means of having it.

And thoſe who are inexorable concerning their rights, who follow them up by the rigorous ways of juſtice, who know no temperament, no accommodation, and are always ready

to

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to enter into or to ſuſtain a lawſuit; are they happy? can they poſſibly be ſo?

O chriſtian meekneſs! the world has baniſhed thee from the region which it inhabits; for which it is ſeverely puniſhed, and for which it will one day be infinitely more ſo. Let it abjure the maxims that are ſo fatal to its happineſs; let it ſubmit itſelf to the divine Legiſlator: and of a country of diviſions, of quarrels, of hatred, and of revenge, of an anticipated hell; it will make an abode of charity, of mutual forbearance, of love, of reconciliation, a terreſtrial paradiſe.

THIRD BEATITUDE.

Bleſſed are they that mourn; for they ſhall be comforted. By thoſe who mourn, we are to underſtand both thoſe chriſtans, who having had the misfortune to offend God, ſincerely return to him again, who deteſt and repair their ſins, and ſpend in penance the remainder of their life; and thoſe pure and innocent ſouls, who being weaned at an early period from the vain pleaſures of the world, embrace a ſerious and an auſtere tenor of life, deeply deplore their own miſery, and lament that God is ſo ill ſerved, and ſo much offended, and that ſo many ſouls ſhould hurry on to their eternal perdition.

Bleſſed

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Jeſus Chriſt pronounces ſuch perſons bleſſed; becauſe conſolation awaits them; and a conſolation that is ſolid and intimate, that will diſſipate all their ſorrows, and that never will paſs away. *You ſhall lament and weep*, does he ſay elſewhere to his diſciples; *but the world ſhall rejoice; but your ſorrow ſhall be turned into joy: and your joy no man ſhall take from you.* David repreſents the true ſervants of God in this mortal life, as huſbandmen that ſow in toil and in tears; but that at harveſt they ſhall come with joyfulneſs, carrying their ſheaves *. God himſelf ſhall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death ſhall be no more; nor mourning, nor crying, nor ſorrow ſhall be more: for the former ſtate is paſſed away; and God ſhall create in their favour a new ſtate of things, where all good things will be found, without any mixture of evil.

Are then the friends of God deſtitute of all conſolation upon earth; do they taſte no comforts that are ſuperior to any that the world can afford? From whence then ariſes the habitual peace of their ſoul, and the ſerenity of their countenance? Why did St. Paul declare that he felt a ſuperabundant joy in all his tribulations? Why did he ſay that the God of all conſolation fortified him in ſuch a manner in his afflictions, as to enable him to afford comfort

* Pſal. cxxv. † Apoc. xxi.

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to thoſe, who were tried by adverſity? Behold an apoſtle, who not only was abſolutely divorced from the pleaſures of the world, but was the victim of its moſt cruel perſecutions; whoſe life was a continued ſeries of toils, dangers, and of croſſes of every kind; who in the midſt of them ſought for no mitigation from creatures; who aſked even none from God, happy that he was to ſuffer for his ſake: behold, I ſay, an apoſtle, who is ſo powerfully conſoled and ſupported from above, as to diffuſe among the ſuffering faithful the ſuperabundance and ſuperfluity of his joy. Why did St. Xaverius cry out in the midſt of his apoſtolical labours, yet overflowing with heavenly delights; *Enough, O Lord, enough;* thy conſolations are too much for my weakneſs? Why was there never a ſaint, never an inward ſoul; I do not ſay who was deſirous of exchanging the hardſhips and trials of virtue for the vain pleaſures of the earth, but who even wiſhed that God would leſſen them, and who did not retract the complaints, that weak nature occaſionally might have been betrayed into? This is atteſted by the whole ſeries of their hiſtory. It conſequently follows, that thoſe ſufferings were not without conſolation, and that a ſupernatural power raiſed them above all human diſtreſs.

Yes, I advance, appealing to all converted ſinners, that the tears of penance are incom-

parably

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parably ſweeter than all the voluptuous delights of the world. But if the tears of penance contain ſo much ſweetneſs, what muſt be the tears of love? Worldlings believe nothing of this; becauſe they have never experienced any thing of the kind; they have not even an idea of it. But can common ſenſe allow us to rely upon their judgment in this matter? can they themſelves rely on it? and if they were equitable, would they not agree that they were not competent judges in this particular, as they never had any experience of it, and never tried to acquire any.

They ceaſe not to ſay: Happy are thoſe who laugh! Happy are thoſe who taſte the pleaſures of life, and have the ways and means of diverſifying and multiplying them! But in the firſt place, the goſpel, through the mouth of the Eternal Truth, decides the contrary. *Woe to you that laugh*, to you who have your conſolation here below; you will one day weep; and your tears will never dry up, and nothing will mitigate their bitterneſs. They reject the thought of this dreadful threat of endleſs weeping and gnaſhing of teeth; but their not thinking of it does not retard the moment of its approach; and when it ſhall come, their joy ſhall be changed into a profound and irremediable ſorrow.

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Secondly, this joy, which they ſo much boaſt, is it real? does it reach the bottom of the heart, or does it ſtop at the ſurface? is it a joy which reaſon may avow, which keeps man in calmneſs, and leaves him the free uſe of his intellectual faculties? is it without mixture of vexation? is it durable? does it repel tedioufneſs, that poiſon of human life? Let them anſwer here honeſtly, after having reflected on the nature of this joy, and on the effects which it produces in their ſoul; if it be not ſuch as I have been ſaying, ſound reaſon diſavows it, and rejects the idea of its being conducive to happineſs.

After all, from what ſource does it flow? is it from the paſſions? But according to philoſophy, not excepting that of Epicurus, the paſſions are inimical to all wiſdom, without which there can be no happineſs. The paſſions are ſhameful, and we try to hide them from ourſelves; and ſhall man place his happineſs in what conſtitutes his ſhame? The paſſions are unruly and diſorderly; can happineſs be found in what is out of rule and of order? In ſhort, the paſſions are ſad; there is not one of them that does not devour and conſume the ſoul, that is enthralled by it; not one, which upon reflection we do not groan under, and which we do not ardently wiſh to be freed from. Let us

therefore

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therefore wave the paſſions, and ceaſe to expect from them happineſs, with which they are incompatible.

What are the other pleaſures of the world? Is it gaming? The world has perverted the nature and the deſign of it. It is no longer a diverſion; but a ſerious occupation, that keeps wound up the whole attention of the mind, and agitates the heart with contrary motions. It is an allurement to covetouſneſs; a commerce of intereſt, where dexterity, and ſometimes fraud, try mutually to ſupplant each other; it is a trial of hazard, where the fortune of the gameſter is always in danger, where the pleaſure of his gain is balanced from one moment to another by the grief of his loſs; it is a lottery, the chance of which he expects in anxious ſuſpenſe between hope and fear; where he is always putting in, that he may recover what he has loſt, and where he is ruined, through the hope of becoming rich; it is a tempeſtuous ocean, where one wave lifts you up, and another lets you down; where one wind drives you on, another drives you back; and where at every moment you run the hazard of being wrecked. The gameſter, whether he wins or loſes, puts on a good face, but is inwardly racked with moſt violent paſſions. And can that be a pleaſure which in itſelf is a torture; which in its conſequences

conſequences impairs health, ruins fortunes, and brings on beggary?

Is it in feaſting? But at moſt entertainments there is much conſtraint and reſerve; the moſt delicate meats ſoon bring on a diſguſt, and render the palate more difficult in its choice. A good appetite, which is the beſt ſeaſoning to viands; and a ſound ſtomach, which facilitates digeſtion, is much more the portion of the poor man, who lives frugally by his labour, than of the rich, who ſit down to table without being hungry, and whoſe ſtomach, being loaded with ſuperfluities, performs very imperfectly its functions. If eating and drinking be a pleaſure that ſhould attract the attention of a rational being, it is not a faſtidious opulence that reliſhes it the moſt. As to the exceſſes of debauchery and drunkenneſs, that attend the feaſtings of voluptuous libertines, no honeſt and reaſonable man will give them the name of pleaſure; and thoſe who may call them ſuch, are evidently contradicted by the ſad effects that are unavoidably the reſult of intemperance.

Is it in going to plays, whither moſt worldlings reſort, and return from them empty and fatigued? The diſplay of ſtrong paſſions only awakens our own, and the ſoul is more taken up with itſelf, than with what it ſees and hears.

Violent

Violent emotions ſo rapidly ſucceed each other, as finally to tire and exhauſt. Comedy, indeed, occaſions laughter, but it is a convulſive laughter brought on by fits, the mere effect of the imagination, and which, muſt be ſparingly indulged, to prevent its being hurtful. Can ſuch a mechanical laughter be the reſult of real joy? Is it an indication of the compoſure of the ſoul? Does it allow you the power of reflection and the poſſeſſion of yourſelf? And when it ceaſes, do you not fall back into your former gloomineſs?

Such are the chief diverſions of the world. Do they make people happy? was it ever even imagined that they could afford any happineſs? moſt certainly not? they are at beſt a momentary digreſſion from the cares with which worldlings are aſſailed, and clearly prove that to thoſe who ſtand in need of them, their exiſtence is a burden, that they are habitually wretched, and only aim at ſelf-forgetfulneſs. But what do they get by loſing themſelves in this rapid ſucceſſion of falſe pleaſures? They deprive themſelves of reflection, the only means of extricating them from their unhappy ſtate. Such remedies as thoſe which have no other tendency than to hinder a man from entering into himſelf, preſuppoſe that he cannot live with himſelf, without being moleſted with corroding care; which, in order to avoid, he has recourſe to ſenſible objects.

objects. But they only are dangerous palliatives, which whilſt by intervals they ſuſpend the evil, ſerve but to increaſe it, and to render it more inſupportable. I advance nothing here, the proof of which, each one does not carry in his heart. I have, therefore, reaſon to conclude, that he who cannot be without theſe kind of pleaſures, on that very account muſt be wretched; and becomes ſtill more ſo, by the uſe of them, in as much as in the long run they loſe all their virtue.

The real chriſtians ſtand not in need of ſuch remedies; which is an infallible mark that they are happy; becauſe they can dwell with pleaſure within themſelves: they at firſt deprive themſelves of them, through principle of conſcience; and God amply compenſates that ſmall ſacrifice. They ſoon perceive that they have loſt nothing by it; and, for a ſuperficial joy, they obtain a firm, tranquil, and an unalterable gaiety; the certain conſequence of ſolid piety. Moderate amuſements occaſionally are not forbidden them; which they know how to taſte with ſo much the more ſatisfaction, as their conſcience does not reproach them, and as they loſe not whilſt they partake of them the intimate enjoyment of God.

Incredible as it may ſeem, I venture to advance, that it is among thoſe who are totally ſequeſtered from the world; it is in the auſtereſt cloiſter,

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cloiſter, where the real joy reſides, the innocent and pure joy, in which the ſoul recruits its ſtrength to ſerve God better, and better to practiſe the exercifes of penance and of prayer. There laughter is gracious, becauſe it is cordial, and the moſt innocent trifle excites it. It is ſo natural; it ſhews ſuch an inward contentment, that externs, who ſometimes witneſs it, not only are aſtoniſhed, but even jealous and envious. For the glory of God, I moreover declare, that I never ſaw any one laugh more heartily than a certain perſon, who, joined to the moſt terrible inward trials, the moſt dreadful auſterities, and who in the intervals of her frightful temptations, was gaiety itſelf. How truly did that ſoul verify the ſaying of our Lord; *Bleſſed are thoſe who mourn; for they ſhall be comforted!* There could not be a life more ſevere and more painful to nature, from the accumulation, the continuity, and the durations of her croſſes and temptations; whilſt at the ſame time, there never was a life exteriorly more cheerful, more ſerene, and more expreſſive of a heavenly joy, which was perceptible to every beholder.

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FOURTH BEATITUDE.

Bleſſed are they that hunger and thirſt after juſtice; for they ſhall have their fill. The ſoul, as well as the body, wants nouriſhment; has its hunger and thirſt; which are more ardent, and are more ſtrongly felt, when it enters into itſelf. This want proceeds from its not being ſufficient to itſelf; a quality which appertains only to God. But it is not every aliment that is proper to aſſuage this hunger and thirſt; it muſt be ſuitable to the nature of the ſoul, and proportioned to the immenſity of its deſires. As its two principal faculties are the underſtanding and will, its two principal deſires are of knowing and of loving: theſe have no bounds, and cannot be filled, but by an object that is infinite. For it is impoſſible that the ſoul ſhould ſtop at any thing that is finite; the moment it perceives it to be ſuch, it reaches ſtill further, and admits of no limits, either to its knowledge or love. Hence it follows, that, as there is no object that is infinite but God, he is the only aliment of the ſoul; the only one capable of ſatisfying its hunger and its thirſt.

The preſent life is not the place where it can be fully ſatiated; that is reſerved for it in the life

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life to come. But it ought here below to aim at ſecuring that eternal ſatiety. Jeſus Chriſt teaches us the means of ſo doing, in theſe words; *Bleſſed are they that hunger and thirſt after juſtice.* By juſtice, he means holineſs, and the aſſemblage of the virtues from whence it reſults. In fact, by holineſs alone can we approach to God, who is holy by eſſence, and who cannot unite himſelf with that which is not ſo. It is therefore neceſſary, that the chriſtian, in order to be happy, ſhould be deſirous to be holy, and that he ſhould labour to become ſo. The keener this his hunger and thirſt ſhall be, the more will he be ſated; God, with whom he ſhall have ardently deſired to be united; God, towards whom he ſhall have inceſſantly approached, by wiſh, love, and by deed, will complete that union of faith and deſire, with another immediate and intimate union; he will make him enter into his joy, and ſhare with him in his eternal felicity: then all hunger, thirſt and deſire will be no more; he will poſſeſs the ſovereign good, with aſſurance of poſſeſſing it for ever.

I ſhall be ſatisfied, ſaid the royal prophet, *when thy glory ſhall appear**. *Thy children*, does he ſay elſewhere, *ſhall be inebriated with the plenty of thy houſe; and thou ſhalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleaſure; for with thee is the fountain of*

* Pſal. xvi.

*of life, and in thy light we ſhall ſee light**.]
aſpires after knowledge, and the divine l
ſhining upon him will open to him an inf
treaſure of knowledge, and will ſhew him e
thing in God: he will ſee enough to ſatisfy
moſt vaſt underſtanding, and enough to ad
for endleſs ages. Man is fond of enjoym
and God will diſplay to him all the mag
cence of his riches; he will laviſh them u
him; he will cauſe to flow in upon him
exhauſtleſs torrent of the pureſt delights. T
will he be happy, and happy for ever, accor
to the capacity of his being.

But are not this hunger and thirſt after
tice his torment here below? does not (
exact from him painful duties, as neceſſar
holineſs; and is not every duty thus enjoi
an obſtacle to his preſent happineſs, as it pu
conſtraint on his liberty? Thus do worldli
think and ſay, and even imperfect chriſti
Both the one and the other ſet blaſpheme w
they do not underſtand. No; the hunger
thirſt after juſtice are not and cannot, be a
ment to a ſoul that is guided by ſound reaſ
that is enlightened and animated by grace.
carries within itſelf an innate reſpect, eſtee
and love for whatever is honeſt, juſt, holy, a
conformable to order. Grace unfolds th
firſt germes, which are implanted by the Crea

* Pſal. xxxv.

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in the heart of man; it expands his mind, and warms his will; it excites him to practiſe that which is the object of his approbation and love; and affords him ſtrength to overcome whatever oppoſition he may experience within himſelf.

The duties which God exacts of man, in order to bring him to holineſs, are not, in themſelves painful. The difficulty that attends them comes from the reſiſtance of corrupt nature. But grace, when once we have reſolved to follow it, ſmooths by degrees that difficulty, which, by the influence of virtuous habits, almoſt intirely vaniſhes at laſt.

Beſides, it is abſolutely falſe that every duty is in itſelf an obſtacle to the preſent happineſs of a rational being, to whom reaſon intimates thoſe duties: on the contrary, it is but by the diſcharge of them that he can actually be happy; nor can he poſſibly violate them, without being unhappy from the inward reproaches of his conſcience. It is not leſs falſe to ſay, that duty is a reſtraint upon liberty; which is only given to us, that we may do what is right, and that through our own choice; for without that, no action would be morally good, nor deſerving of reward; and when we ſubject our liberty to our duty, we anſwer the purpoſe for which it was given us: inſtead of confining it, we enlarge it; inſtead of enſlaving it, we give it freer ſcope. The notion of being free, is not to do whatſoever

ſoever we may chuſe to do; but to do what we ought to do, with the power of not doing it; and to hold our free will ſubmiſſive to the immutable rule of order, is to make a proper uſe of it, upon which our happineſs depends.

This happineſs, therefore, commences here below, through a hunger and thirſt after juſtice, or after holineſs; and it will be perfect in heaven, through our indiſſoluble union with God, who is holineſs itſelf. Though we are only to be fully ſatiated above, we ſtill aſſuage our hunger upon earth, by the practice of our duties. It awakens, it is true, and makes itſelf be felt at every inſtant; but it is a ſentiment no ways importune to him who is willing to ſatisfy it; it would even be a motive of real grief to a chriſtian not to experience it. He would think himſelf dead to what is good; and to grace, which is the ſource of all that is good; he conſiders himſelf happy, and, in fact, is ſo, but in as much as he has a reliſh and an ardour for virtue, and craves after the practice of it. Is it not being happy by anticipation, to know, love, and ſerve here below that Being, the ſight and the love of whom will conſtitute our eternal felicity?

The world is groſsly miſtaken, when it holds thoſe to be unhappy who only hunger and thirſt after ſupernatural things, which appear to it nearly imaginary, becauſe it neither ſees nor

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feels ſuch things; as if that, which is of a ſpiritual ſubſtance, could be any ways ſenſible. Its maxim is, happy are thoſe who are ſated with riches, honours, and pleaſures; hence it is towards thoſe objects, which alone it conſiders to be real and ſolid, that the ſoul ought to bend its hunger and its thirſt.

But, in the firſt place, conſtant experience ſhews, that neither the ambitious, nor the avaricious, nor the voluptuous, are ever ſated; that they always wiſh for more than what they actually poſſeſs; and therefore that they always aim at being happy, and never are ſo. And upon what account? It is becauſe thoſe objects being of an inferior nature to that of the ſoul, the poſſeſſion of them cannot perfect the ſoul; but on the contrary, defiles and degrades it. Now it is an undoubted principle, that what does not perfect the ſoul, cannot contribute to its happineſs; and that what defiles and degrades it, directly tends to render it unhappy. The reaſon of which is, that the perfection of the ſoul is the immediate diſpoſition towards its happineſs, and even is the moral cauſe of it. Good and happy, wicked and unhappy, are two ideas that hold inſeparably together, of which the one is the conſequence of the other. Profane philoſophy was not ignorant of this truth; and Socrates every where reaſons on this foundation.

Beſides

Beſides riches, honours, and pleaſures only act on the ſenſes and the imagination; and neither the ſenſations nor the phantoms of the imagination can conſtitute the happineſs of an intelligent being. He muſt have other objects to ſatisfy the two chief faculties, his underſtanding and will. And therefore the man, who vainly flatters himſelf, that he will have nothing more to wiſh for, when once he ſhall enjoy ſuch a fortune, ſuch a pleaſure, and ſuch a dignity, finds out his illuſion the moment he is in poſſeſſion of the object of his wiſh. But inſtead of coming from his error, he forms new deſires, and runs after other objects of a ſimilar nature, always in hopes of finding in the latter, what he could not meet with in the former. Thus does he perſevere till death, when he is ſadly and vainly undeceived. It may be ſaid that thoſe truths are ſo well known, that they are trivial; I allow it; yet they are important, and notwithſtanding all their importance, few there are who make them the rule of their conduct.

In the ſecond place, what is a happineſs that ſo many people diſpute about, and to which ſo few attain? A happineſs that more than three parts of mankind, from their very condition, are obliged to renounce? a happineſs that affords neither joy nor health, that is no longer reliſhed, which is no longer thought of, ſhould the body or ſoul be ill affected; that the leaſt pain, the

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leaſt uneaſineſs of mind cauſes to diſappear? What is a happineſs that you never can detain, and that always is ready to forſake you? What becomes of the man of pleaſure, when age and infirmities, or when habit and ſatiety have brought on a diſguſt of what formerly was his delight? How wretched is the condition of the miſer, when a thouſand accidents, which he neither could foreſee nor obviate, have robbed him of his treaſures? Is he not more ſenſible to the loſs, than he ever was to the enjoyment of them? and when the ambitious man is forced to ſtep down, perhaps with ignominy, from the high ſtation to which he painfully aſcended, what muſt be his anguiſh and deſpair? O, how much are the inſenſate to be pitied, who run after a happineſs which they are never ſure to attain; of which they are frequently fruſtrated; in which they find nothing but ſmoke and emptineſs, and of which, after all, they cannot enſure the poſſeſſion! If all were to end with life, they ſtill would be wretched. But of what ineffable happineſs do they not deprive themſelves; and to what dreadful miſery do they not expoſe themſelves?

He who hungers and thirſts after juſtice, meets with no rivals nor envious in his career; every man, of whatſoever rank or condition he may be, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, in ſickneſs or in health, may advance in it; his

race

race is not liable to be interrupted or thwarted by any human event; on the contrary, every thing helps to render it more rapid; and he is ſure of reaching the goal, where, together with immortality, he will experience a full ſatiety of all his deſires.

FIFTH BEATITUDE.

Bleſſed are the merciful; for they ſhall obtain mercy. We all ſtand in the greateſt need of the mercies of God, both for this world and the next. It is his merciful providence that ſo arranges every event in behalf of his elect, as to ſecure to them their final deſtiny. It is through pure mercy, that God forgives our ſins, as often as we return to him in humble repentance. It is through an attention that is full of mercy, that he preſerves us from a crowd of temptations, to which through our weakneſs we ſhould yield. All thoſe graces, whether common or perſonal, known or unknown, which he inceſſantly beſtows on us, are ſo many effects of his mercy. That ſpecial grace, which prepares us for a happy death, which cuts the thread of life, whilſt we are in a happy ſtate, and ſecures our perſeverance, we owe it to his mercy. In a word, it is his mercy that crowns and rewards our good works; and if he has engaged himſelf

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ſo to do through his juſtice, he owes it not to us, but to himſelf, in conſequence of his own purely-gratuitous promiſes. Alas! what are our good works in themſelves; and what eſtimate would he form of them, were he to examine them in full rigour? Woe to the life the moſt praiſe-worthy, ſays St. Auſtin, if they ſcrutinize it without mercy! This mercy, which according to the Scripture is above all the works of God, attends us from our birth to our laſt gaſp, and follows us to the dread tribunal that is to decide our eternal lot.

Now the nature of mercy is to be gratuitous; it is not a debt, but a pure benefit; and the Benefactor has a right to annex it to whatſoever condition he pleaſes. Jeſus Chriſt declares to us here, and in ſeveral other places of the goſpel, that God will ſhew mercy to thoſe who ſhall have practiſed it towards their neighbour, who ſhall have been charitable and compaſſionate to him, who ſhall have aſſiſted him, at leaſt in wiſh and deſire, in his neceſſities both temporal and ſpiritual. Happy, therefore, with reſpect to eternal life, are the men of mercy.

But are they not already ſo in this life, as much as it is poſſible for them to be? Is there a ſentiment that is more pleaſing, more congenial to the heart, than that of compaſſion? is there a comfortable feeling equal to that of relieving the wretched? is there a mean more ſure

of

of obtaining confidence and love? and if this be true, with reſpect to temporal diſtreſs, how much more ſo muſt it be in regard to the ſpiritual wants of our neighbour? Who, beſides the man who has experienced it, can ſet a juſt value on the comfort that a miniſter of God feels, when he reconciles a ſinner to his Maker, and brings back to him a ſtrayed ſheep; when he removes the perplexities of his neighbour, counſels him in his doubt, calms his conſcience, ſtrengthens him in his weakneſs, reſtores him to peace in his ſufferings, ſupports him in his temptations; eſpecially when he diſpoſes him to a chriſtian death, and ſucceeds in engaging him to adopt the ſentiments he ſuggeſted to him? The ſole tendency, therefore, of the goſpel, is to make men happy, both in this world and the next; all its maxims and precepts have no other objects. The charitable man, by his attention to the happineſs of others, infallibly ſecures his own.

An impious and libertine ſet of worldlings, who are hardly bold enough to calumniate charity, yet ſubſtitute humanity in its room, and pretend that, independently of any ſupernatural motive, it is ſufficient to reflect that we are men, to be induced to befriend our fellow-men. According to this philoſophy, which is as falſe as it is dazzling, the relief of our neighbour in his ſpiritual neceſſities, which is by far the moſt important, moſt be neglected, forſaken, and

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and totally done away. Our pretended ſages try to perſuade themſelves, that by their irreligious principles they drain the ſource of all ſuch neceſſities, and thereby render more ſervice to mankind. Without going farther, what has lately happened in France, and what that nation will long ſorely feel, clearly demonſtrates how fatal a thing it is to deſtroy religion, and to oppreſs its miniſters. What benefit have thoſe people reaped from ſetting up and decreeing ſuch principles, as well as thoſe who have adopted them? By what horrid means did they reduce them to practice! To what extremities did they drive all ranks and conditions, in baniſhing from the kindom chriſtan charity, together with thoſe who practiſed it!

But this charming philanthropy, that laughs at all ſpiritual ſuccours, and teaches the uſeleſſneſs of them, is it at leaſt attentive to the relief of the temporal wants of mankind? In their writings, language, and projects, nothing is more humane and beneficent. But how is it in the execution? Poſſibly ſome liberalities proclaimed with oſtentation, diſtributed without diſcernment, and preſently failing in their ſource: it produces nothing elſe. Beſides, the deſigns of theſe grand partiſans of humanity are no longer a ſecret; they have at laſt expoſed to broad day light, what was concealed under ſuch ſpecious appearances. Let them ſound as loud as they will the words of

of philanthropy and beneficence, I maintain that the ſentiments that correſpond to thoſe words are quite foreign to every one that has not and will not have religion. I maintain that whatſoever is an enemy to chriſtian charity, is an intereſted, hard-hearted, inſenſible egotiſt, who is more diſpoſed to ſtrip the poor of what little they have, than to ſupply them with what they want. I maintain that the ſight of a needy or ſuffering object, far from exciting his compaſſion, ſtrikes him with horror, and provokes him to contempt. I maintain that baſhful diſtreſs which hides itſelf from public notice, and only reveals itſelf in ſecret, has no acceſs to him, makes no impreſſion on him, and is always ſure of a repulſe, when no motive of vanity intervenes as a check upon him. Finally, I maintain that the alms that vain-glory may draw from him, never are accompanied with any of thoſe demonſtrations of tenderneſs and pity, which are as comfortable to the deſtreſſed as the benefit itſelf. It is well known, without my telling it, what advantage has accrued to the poor from the ſpoliation of the clergy, brought on by ſuch humane philoſophers. They have robbed indigence of its patrimony and of all its reſources; it now dwells in every town, in every province, and overſpreads all France.

Profane worldlings, with whom mercy is but an empty name, humanity but a cloak to

palliate

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palliate your avarice and hardneſs of heart, and a pretext to diſcredit the chriſtian religion; you cannot impart happineſs, you are not happy yourſelves, and are preparing for yourſelves an endleſs miſery. *For judgment without mercy, to him that hath not done mercy* *, and much more ſo to him who, having baniſhed mercy from his own heart, has endeavoured to root it out of the heart of others.

SIXTH BEATITUDE.

Bleſſed are the clean of heart: for they ſhall ſee God. At each beatitude, Jeſus Chriſt informs us, under various expreſſions, that the happineſs of man is reſerved for the other life, in which he is to ſee and poſſeſs God; and that in this he is only happy, through the hope and the foretaſte of ſo deſirable a ſtate. What is requiſite to ſee God, that being of an infinite purity, of which it is impoſſible even for the greateſt ſaints to form an idea? It is to have a heart free from every affection that is foreign to his love. The whole Chriſtian perfection is included in this purity; and as cleanneſs of heart may always increaſe, the perfection of a chriſtian has conſequently no bounds.

It

* Jac. ii. 13.

It has been elſewhere obſerved, that all our affections muſt have a reference to the love of God, that they muſt be purified and ſanctified by that love, that in this principle they muſt not be diſtinct from it, but muſt form one and the ſelf-ſame love. As long as the ſoul admits of any mixture of ſelf-love, it cannot be elevated to the beatific viſion. Were we to die in the ſtate of grace, we ſhould have to paſs through the dreadful fire of purgatory, and ſuffer a more or leſs enduring privation of the ſovereign good, until we be entirely diſengaged from all impurity, and until the divine love reign in us excluſively of every other love. But whoſoever dies with a heart truly pure, will immediately be admitted to the ſight of God.

From hence we may eaſily conceive how much it behoves us to acquire here below this purity, not only ſuch as conſiſts in ſanctifying grace, but alſo that purity in which charity is free from the leaſt ſhade of ſelf-property. This is one of the reaſons for which we are commanded to love God with our whole heart, in order to be in a condition to poſſeſs him at the moment he ſhall call us to himſelf. Every diſpoſition on our part that might oblige God in the leaſt to defer his receiving us into his boſom, is therefore contrary to the grand precept of the love of God. From whence we may judge how careful the chriſtian ſhould be to purify his affections.

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affections. To this point are directed all the goſpel-maxims that relate to the mortification of the heart. Thoſe maxims extend much farther than is generally imagined; and there are very few who have a juſt notion of their meaning. The mortification of the heart, the practice of which ſeems ſo difficult, opens the gates of heaven, and leads to eternal felicity. I ſhall not ſee God, until my heart ſhall be purified; and that ſight will be ſo much the more perfect, as my heart ſhall be pure; and the degree of its purity will be the meaſure of my happineſs. Do I require more to induce me to embrace mortification, and root out ſelf-love? Should we not conſider one as ſenſeleſs, who, at the expenſe of the hardſhip of a few hours, ſhould refuſe to purchaſe peace and comfort for the remainder of his life? Had we the leaſt ſpark of faith, we ſhould ſee that it is a folly incomparably greater to be unwilling to reſtrain one's ſelf during the courſe of this mortal life, in order to attain more aſſuredly and ſooner to the ſight and the poſſeſſion of God; we would apply to every violence we had to uſe, theſe words of the apoſtle: *That which is at preſent momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above meaſure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory* *.

* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

But what name can be given to ſuch a folly, if it be true that the labour of purifying the heart is the beſt and the only means of ſecuring to ourſelves any degree of happineſs upon earth? From whence proceed all the torments of the ſoul? Philoſophy itſelf teaches us that they originate from its ill-regulated, inordinate, and exceſſive affections. Eſtabliſh rule, order, and moderation, and the ſoul is tranquil. All deſires, fears, all reſtleſſneſs and anxieties, all murmurs and complaints, all ſadneſs, anguiſh, and deſpair have no other ſource than ſelf-love, and want of ſubmiſſion to the divine will. Subdue ſelf-love, which is evidently unjuſt and unreaſonable; keep, as you ought to do, your will ſubordinate to the will of God; look for and receive every thing from his holy hand; bleſs him as Job did, for the evils as well as for the good things he ſends, and you will enjoy calmneſs and peace.

It coſts much, you will ſay, thus to curb and ſubdue one's ſelf. But does it coſt leſs to give looſe to every impulſe of nature? you only conſider the hour of the combat; conſider alſo the conſequences and the fruits of the victory. Begin by acknowledging that you never enjoyed either happineſs or peace, as long as you yielded to the deſires of your heart: this is a truth, which upon reflexion you have ever been convinced of. If ſo, and if you ſeriouſly mean to be

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be happy, you have nothing elſe left, but to mortify thoſe deſires. Anſwer this queſtion: do you believe that the love of God will form your happineſs in eternity? You would not be a chriſtian, were you to doubt it. If, therefore, you muſt form your happineſs during time, for its nature is the ſame, and produces in man the ſame effects, as far as our preſent condition can admit: you therefore cannot be happy here below, but in as much as you love God. But the purer your heart is, and the more free from every other love, the more you will love him. Hence it is that you directly proſecute your happineſs, when by mortification you try to purify your heart. I know that to be well convinced of this, we muſt have had the experience of it; but after ſuch formal and reiterated expreſſions of the goſpel, after ſo many cogent reaſons, after the unanimous conſent of the ſaints, how can we refuſe to try the experiment?

You do not refuſe it, you will ſay. But your courage fails; the continuity tires you; you ſee no end to ſuch an inteſtine warfare. But how! your courage fails you, in aiming at being happy! You tire at the continuity of a path, in which every ſtep you take advances you to happineſs! and you boldly aſſert, that you ſee no end to this warfare, whilſt it is certain that

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the firſt efforts overcome the moſt powerful oppoſitions, and that the victory becomes daily leſs arduous! In this caſe, our ſelf-love impoſes upon us, and we are not unwilling that it ſhould; it makes us believe, that by entering into a compoſition with it, we ſhall not be loſers, and we fall into the ſnare, for want of conſulting ſound reaſon, faith, and our own experience.

The world, being quite earthly and carnal, does not affix any kind of happineſs to the intuitive viſion of God; it has no knowledge of the cleanneſs of heart, that produces the pure love of God, nor of the mortification of unruly affections that conducts to that perfect cleanneſs. And how ſhould it; as even the major part of real chriſtians are unacquainted with it. Some confine themſelves to the avoiding of mortal ſin: others to the ſhunning of deliberate faults, that are any ways conſiderable; but when they are told to purify their mind from a thouſand frivolous and idle thoughts that bring on diſſipation, and their heart from a crowd of little attachments that weaken the love of God; when they are told to curb their humour, and to correct their character; to repel the views and the ſuggeſtions of ſelf-love, as they do not think themſelves obliged to it, they will not underſtand it; they have hardly a notion of it,

and

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and cannot be prevailed upon to practice it. O how rare is cleanneſs of heart, and how few there are who try to acquire it!

The ſentence of Jeſus Chriſt is too ſublime, even to be calumniated by the world, that has no conception of it; it is never made mention of either in the converſations or in the writings of its partiſans. But it has its own objects of felicity, which, as they are low and earthly, debaſe the heart, and ſully the affections. It knows not what it is to lift itſelf up to things ſpiritual, ſupernatural, and eternal; and is conſtantly plunged in the mire of creatures. Yet, in order to aſpire after this felicity that is purely animal, it has to undergo a much ſeverer mortification, than that which is preſcribed by the goſpel, to which it ſubmits without difficulty, and thinks it reaſonable ſo to do. If it has defects of character, inclinations, and paſſions that might prove obſtructive to its pleaſures, fortune, and preferment, it does not indeed correct or root them out; but it hides and conceals them, and ſhews itſelf quite oppoſite to what it really is, and is in a continued ſtate of violence. This violence, I know, is merely exterior, the interior is the ſame, and the heart retains the ſame diſpoſitions: but upon this very account, the mortification is the greater; becauſe, being forced, the heart is enraged at the conſtraint it experiences. What a train of vexations muſt that

that worldling undergo, who ſuffers himſelf to be enſlaved by a fading beauty? What haughtineſs and diſdain muſt he not put up with, who courts the protection of ſome great perſonage? They ſuffer and deſpond, yet muſt conceal their feelings.

Such is the tyranny of the world over its ſlaves, whilſt at the ſame time it pronounces them happy; they themſelves ſay the ſame, though in their heart they think the contrary. But their ſlavery goes to that paſs, and the world would ſoon diſcard them, ſhould they venture to publiſh what they ſecretly utter, and with which they dare hardly to intruſt their moſt intimate friends. Thus every way mortified, conſtrained, contradicted, and humbled, they are forced to put up with endleſs vexations, and yet appear to be perfectly ſatisfied. Compare this ſtate towards happineſs both future and preſent, with that of a chriſtian, who for God's ſake purifies his heart.

Perhaps you will ſay that the ſlavery of the world is not continual; that there is a time when you can ſhake off all dependance, and live unconſtrained. I know not when that time can arrive, unleſs it be when you have no farther pretenſions; when you no longer hope to pleaſe the world, and when it abandons you, and forces you to abandon it. But as long as you have any expectations from it; as long as you place

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place in it your felicity, it will enthral you, nor will you have leſs to ſuffer in your latter years, than you had in your former. On this head I appeal to thoſe of both ſexes, who, notwithſtanding the unpleaſantneſs and the infirmities of an advanced age, are ſtill deſirous to figure in aſſemblies, and to be of every party of pleaſure.

Ye worldlings, boaſt now, if you can, your uncontroul and your liberty. Pity the chriſtian, who ſtudies to mortify his heart, and ſay, that he is wretched. He retorts this upon you with much greater reaſon, upon you who are no more than vile and miſerable ſlaves, loaded with the heavieſt of chains, which in ſpite of you, you drag along; and who, to complete your wretchedneſs, are forced to call yourſelves free.

SEVENTH BEATITUDE.

Bleſſed are the peace-makers; for they ſhall be called the children of God. The child of God has a right to paternal inheritance; the riches of God are his, and he poſſeſſes them in common with his Father. Theſe riches are wholly in God, and are nothing elſe but God himſelf. Jeſus Chriſt therefore promiſes upon this occaſion the eternal poſſeſſion of God and of all true

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riches, to thoſe who are peace-makers; and he juſtly ſtiles them happy, becauſe in this poſſeſſion they enjoy the moſt perfect peace with God, with themſelves, with the angels, and with the elect, their brethren. They no longer will be in danger of offending God, nor of beholding him in anger againſt them; they no longer will apprehend the threats of his juſtice, nor the ſeverity of his judgments, nor the rigour of his vengeance. Admitted to his friendſhip, and to an intimate familiarity with him, they will ſee nothing in him that is terrible, but only what is amiable; and they will enjoy the infinite charms of his perfections, as he himſelf enjoys them, without fearing that their union with him will ever admit of any alteration. They will not be leſs in peace with themſelves. With reſpect to the body, they will have no more wants, no ſickneſs, no infirmities, no ſufferings; with reſpect to the ſoul, they will have no longer wiſhes or fears, no ſorrow nor ſadneſs, no rebellions nor conflicts: all will be in order, all will be tranquil, all will concur to their happineſs. The mind no longer will be agitated by a variety of thoughts: the ſight of God will wholly occupy it; nor will the heart be agitated by a variety of motions, which will all be abſorbed in the love of God; and this love will be an enjoying love, ever ſweet, ever peaceable, ever fully ſatiated. The

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moſt perfect concord will alſo reign among the bleſſed; there will be no ſelf-love, no private intereſt, no jealouſy, no envy. Each one ſatisfied with his lot, will applaud the elevation of others; their felicity will be an addition to his; and as God will be all in all, all will bleſs, praiſe, admire, and love him, as much in others as in themſelves: the diverſe degrees of glory and happineſs, diſtributed in the moſt juſt proportion, according to the merits, will form the beauty of the celeſtial court; and each one will enjoy this raviſhing ſpectacle, with a total diſintereſtedneſs concerning himſelf. O thou ineffable, thou univerſal, thou eternal peace, thou wilt be the reward of thoſe who ſhall have been peace-makers upon earth!

What! is peace to be the reward of peace! Yes; a peace that is purchaſed by efforts, combats, and ſacrifices, will be followed and recompenſed by another moſt delicious peace, in which there will be no room for efforts, conflicts, or ſacrifices. But peace and happineſs are one and the ſame thing. This, therefore, means, that a conſummate and everlaſting happineſs will be the price of a commenced and tranſient happineſs; and that the deſtiny of the chriſtian is to taſte here below the firſt fruits of the felicity that awaits him above. Whoſoever views the chriſtian morality in any other light, does not underſtand it.

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After this, who will dare to say that the school of Jesus Christ is not the school of happiness? What does his gospel, from one end of it to the other, command or recommend, but to preserve peace by every possible means with God, with ourselves, and with our neighbour? with God, by the observance of his commandments; by a filial fear of displeasing him; by an humble return to him, when we have offended him; by prayer, and other pious exercises, that unite us with him; by our submission to his holy will; by our fidelity, in corresponding with his graces; by our confidence in his goodness, and by patience in our trials; with ourselves, by obviating or remedying the reproaches of our conscience; by bridling our passions; by checking our imagination; by maintaining just order in the faculties of the soul; by submitting them to reason, and reason to faith; by weakening from day to day our self-love, the source of all our vices, and of all our vexations; with our neighbour, in the first place, by giving him his due, according to the laws of justice, and by not being too exact and difficult about what may be due to ourselves; and then by being kind and benevolent to him, according to the laws of charity; by being tender of his reputation; by bearing with his defects; by guarding against his feeling ours; by expressing on every occasion a sincere regard for his person,

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and a warm zeal for his intereſts. Is not the whole morality of Jeſus Chriſt reduced to this? and is it not evident that we advance towards happineſs, in proportion as we are exact in following it?

To wiſh to attain this peace, without combating, is chimerical; to effect that, it would be neceſſary that man ſhould be naturally good; a friend to his duties, and free in himſelf from every obſtacle in a faithful diſcharge of them. To ſay that ſuch a peace coſts too much to be acquired, is an abſurdity. The acquiſition of that which is indiſpenſable to happineſs, never can coſt too much. Beſides, the difficulty does not proceed from the things which are preſcribed to me, the oppoſition comes from myſelf; it is this oppoſition, which, with God's aſſiſtance, I have to overcome; and the greater it is, the more I muſt arm myſelf with courage to conquer it, without ever relenting in the conflict: eſpecially as I am ſure of ſucceſs, provided I be willing. In a word, this triple peace is abſolutely neceſſary to me; there is no happineſs for me here below, unleſs I be well with God, with my neighbour, and with myſelf; the means which the goſpel furniſhes me with, are the only efficacious, but they are alſo infallible. I am therefore inſane, and an enemy to my peace, if knowing thoſe means, I do not embrace them. To all this there is no reply.

Such

Such, however, is the blindneſs of the world, that it not only is ignorant of theſe truths, but alſo it derides, it rejects, and with all its might it attacks them. It ſpeaks of nothing but of peace, and pretends to give it to its partiſans; its language on this head is the moſt impoſing. But what kind of peace does it promiſe? a peace with their ſenſes, with their paſſions, and even with their vices, by granting them whatſoever they aſk. This is contradictory; for they always will aſk for more than you will be able, even more than you will be willing to grant; and the leaſt obſtacle, the leaſt refuſal, will irritate them. You have therefore no expectations from that quarter. It promiſes them peace with their neighbour, by keeping up with him the appearance of politeneſs, by ſharing in his pleaſures, by favouring his inclinations, by flattering or extenuating his vices, by adopting the ſame maxims, and by leading the ſame kind of life. Vicious and corrupted men enjoy among themſelves no other peace; it is merely exterior, the heart has no ſhare in it.

But what becomes of this phantom of peace, when their various intereſts mutually claſh; when they purſue and diſpute the ſame objects: when he who has carried it provokes the jealouſy of his rivals; when pride and ſelf-love, that domineer in human life, are wounded, which happens at every turn; when we fancy that

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that our pretenſions are hurt, that our rights are injured, that there is a want of attention to what we think we deſerve?

Is not the world full of diſſenſions, wranglings, hatreds, and revenge? Do not worldlings live in conſtant diffidence of each other? do they not live as if they were in a hoſtile country, where they muſt always be armed, in order to attack or defend themſelves? What a folly it is to try to reconcile mutual peace with ſelf-intereſt, that draws every thing to itſelf, and would leave nothing to others? What an impudent falſhood, to promiſe peace on the one hand, and on the other to authoriſe thoſe maxims that ſet the paſſions at variance, and foment diſſenſions! Find me a worldling, who views the public welfare any other way than with a reference to himſelf, who is over delicate in gratifying himſelf at the expence of others. Find me one who is not envious of the well-being, the fortune, the rank and reputation of another. This unhappy paſſion prevails in every condition from the higheſt to the loweſt. Worldlings, indeed, carefully conceal it; they are aſhamed of it, and ſecretly condemn it: but it is not leſs true, that the morality of the world at bottom excites it, favours and juſtifies it, and at the outſide condemns it in the proceedings of others. And it is to be expected, that for hearts thus diſpoſed, ſuch a morality is calculated

calculated to preſerve peace in ſociety! There never was ſuch a manifeſt inverſion of ideas.

As to peace with God, the world is in no concern about it: it carries its thoughts and deſires elſewhere; it makes it a rule to forget God, to ſet him aſide, and to neglect his worſhip, which it confines to an apparent decency, and to ſome outward forms of religion; but even in that reſpect they undergo no reſtraint. It is always ready to liſten to ſyſtems of impiety and libertiniſm; it grants its favour and protection to the writers who are bold enough to produce them, and takes them for its maſters and doctors, admiring them as the firſt-rate geniuſes. And from whence comes this forgetfulneſs, this contempt of the ſovereign Being? It comes from its judging that the thought of, and a reſpect paid to God, is incompatible with the falſe peace which it has forged, and which it never can realiſe.

It inceſſantly cries out peace, peace. But the Lord has * declared by one of his prophets, that there is no peace for the enemies to piety; and conſequently no happineſs neither in this life nor the other. Every where the worldling, in eternity as well as in time, will be in a ſtate of war with God, with himſelf, and with his fellow-men. That is to ſay, he always carries hell about with him. Here below, he finds out the ſecret

* Iſa. xlviii. 22.

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ſecret of occaſionally diverting his thoughts; but in the other world, that reſource will fail him, and he will become a prey to all the horrors of his wretched ſtate.

EIGHTH BEATITUDE.

Bleſſed are they that ſuffer perſecution for juſtice ſake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. To whom would the kingdom of heaven belong, if it were not deſtined for thoſe who are perſecuted for juſtice ſake? and who deſerves better than they to occupy there a diſtinguiſhed place? In this ſentence, Jeſus Chriſt comprehends thoſe who, for the cauſe of religion, of faith, or of the church, have to ſuffer in their fortunes, in their honour, or life, from infidels, heretics, and ſchiſmatics; thoſe whom a public profeſſion of piety expoſes to cenſures the railleries and the contempt of the world; or who upon that account meet with ill uſages and domeſtic vexations: thoſe alſo who walking in the paths of an interior life, or exhorting others to walk in them, undergo humiliations, calumnies, and open perſecutions from prejudiced perſons, and from thoſe devotees who are guided by their own judgment; laſtly, thoſe who by the divine permiſſion, are tormented with horrible temptations, contrary to purity, faith, hope, and charity;

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rity; who ſuffer great vexations both in body and mind, through the malice of the devil, whoſe martyrdom is incomparably more laſting and more painful than ordinary martyrdoms.

All ſuch chriſtians thus variouſly tried for God's ſake, if they ſuffer with love, humility, patience, and perſeverance, are ſure that their reward will be great in heaven; and particularly with regard to thoſe who give their life for the faith, the church has always profeſſed to believe that immediately on quitting the body, their ſouls were tranſported into glory: ſo that, according to St. Auſtin, to pray for a martyr, would be doing him an injury.

How can God refuſe eternal happineſs, and the firſt places in his kingdom to thoſe who give him the ſtrongeſt proof of love, either in ſhedding their blood for his ſake, or in generouſly ſuffering baniſhment, poverty, priſons, ignominies, calumnies, and all kinds of perſecutions? How can Jeſus Chriſt, whoſe life was ſought for at his birth, who was forced to flee into a ſtrange land; who during his miſſion was expoſed to public envy, and who at laſt was put to an infamous death, refuſe to ſhare his heavenly inheritance with his beſt friends, who had the advantage of reſembling him the moſt? How ſhould not this beatitude, that ſuppoſes and includes all the others in the moſt eminent degree, receive the reward that is promiſed to each one of

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of them? On this head, among all true believers, there is and there can be no doubt.

But are thoſe ſufferers for juſtice ſake, happy under their ſufferings? This ſeems incomprehenſible, and even contradictory to the generality of mankind; who taking the ſenſes for judges, know no evils but thoſe of the body; or who, full of pride and ſelf-love, cannot put up with contempt and calumny; and conſequently pronounce, that happineſs cannot be found in a dolorous or an humbling ſituation.

Were a happineſs purely natural in queſtion, I ſhould not be afraid to appeal to the judgment of reaſon. I would bid them caſt an eye on Socrates drinking his potion of hemlock, and boldly would aſk them, if they were not of opinion that his lot was preferable to that of the iniquitous judges who condemned him. If they ventured to anſwer in the negative, it would be to declare, that virtue is but an empty name, and that it did not deſerve that we ſhould ſuffer for it. I would ſet before them the deciſion of Cicero: who ſays, that it is the voice of reaſon; that Regulus dying amidſt the moſt dreadful torments, in fidelity to his oath, is more happy than the epicure Thorius, on his couch of roſes, and drinking exquiſite wines. Thus has human wiſdom thought and ſpoken, and it would have bluſhed to have thought and ſpoken otherwiſe.

But

But as it is a ſupernatural happineſs of which we now ſpeak, I refer them to the martyrs. Let them interrogate them; let them read their acts; let them weigh their words; let them examine their countenance, their ſerenity, their firmneſs, and their ardour for ſuffering; let them judge whether ſuch men eſteem themſelves happy in ignominy and torments. Let them only read the letters which Ignatius wrote on his journey from Antioch to Rome, to be devoured by wild beaſts.

According to the condition of the preſent life, I call that ſtate happy which we love, with which we are ſatisfied, which we would not exchange for any other, and of which we do not allow ourſelves a wiſh of ſeeing it at an end, or mitigated. Now ſuch has been the diſpoſition of the martyrs, the confeſſors of Jeſus Chriſt, and of all his true diſciples, who have had to ſuffer for the ſake of juſtice. Such a diſpoſition is not, doubtleſs, within the reach of human virtue; it muſt come from a higher region; it is the effect of grace, which animates, ſupports, comforts, and elevates the ſoul above nature, and opens to its view the heavenly manſions. It is, above all, the effect of that ardent charity that made St. Paul ſay; *Who ſhall ſeparate us from the love of Chriſt? ſhall tribulation, or diſtreſs, or famine, or nakedneſs, or danger, or perſecution, or*

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or the ſword? But in all theſe things we overcome; becauſe of him that hath loved us *.

Yes, of all the beatitudes, this is the greateſt and the moſt complete, both in heaven and on earth. How does this happen? it is one of God's ſecrets. He has promiſed to thoſe who ſuffer for his ſake, that they ſhall poſſeſs their ſouls in patience; he fulfils his promiſe; and all thoſe who have gone through ſuch trials, teſtify the truth of his word.

It but too commonly happens that people ſuffer for the world's ſake. What happineſs does it procure for thoſe who ſuffer for it? what reward does it grant them? what encouragement, what comfort does it afford? It has not even words to beſtow; and the firſt thing it does, is to abandon thoſe who are in diſgrace. It has its martyrs; it has thouſands of victims that are ſacrificed to caprices, viciſſitudes, and injuſtices. Has it ever fancied to ſtile them happy? could it even attempt ſo to do, without being in contradiction with itſelf and its maxims? Let us conclude without inſiſting any longer on ſo evident a point, that the world is every way to be pitied, on account of real happineſs of which it is ignorant, and which it never will poſſeſs on account of the falſe pleaſures, the very enjoyment of which is painful and tireſome to it, and on account of the innumerable

* Rom. viii. 35. et ſeq.

merable evils with which it is oppreſſed, and to which it finds no relief.

O Jeſus! the only Benefactor of mankind, when ſhall we open our eyes to ſee the beauty, the wiſdom, and the ſolidity of thy doctrine? It is proof againſt every thing: thy authority renders it unſhaken; experience confirms it, and ſound reaſon juſtifies it. Hadſt thou only uttered the eight ſentences, the explication of which I have been reading, could we diſpute with thee the title of Divine Legiſlator? Thou haſt done more; to the leſſons, thou haſt added example. Thy life, thy death, and its glorious conſequences, ſpeak more forcibly than thy words. But, what no legiſlator has done, nor could have done, thou attracteſt us inwardly by thy grace to the obſervance of thy laws; thou enlighteneſt the minds, thou exciteſt and ſupporteſt the wills; thou aſſuageſt with heavenly conſolations the hardſhips of virtue, and rendereſt the practice of it as ſweet as it is juſt. Thou haſt in reſerve for it the moſt magnificent rewards, and even in this life thou wilt have us reap the fruits of it.

O how I lament my not having embraced thy heavenly doctrine! Alas! I have walked through difficult ways, where I have met with nothing but thorns; and if the long chain of my evils has not terminated in the evil that is extreme and irremediable, I am indebted for ſuch a bleſſing

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a bleſſing to thy goodneſs alone. Hitherto I have been more blind them culpable; but I deem I am unworthy of all pardon, if from this moment I become not a faithful obſerver of a law, to which all my happineſs is annexed. I know my weakneſs, and the force of my habits; but if I rely upon thee, I can do every thing. Support me, O my Saviour, in the new career which I am going to enter, that, on thy footſteps, I may reach the kingdom of heaven. *Amen.*

FOURTEENTH

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FOURTEENTH LESSON.

THE QUALITIES OF CHRISTIAN JUSTICE.

I TELL you, says our Lord, *that unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* It belongs to him who proposes a prize, to affix the conditions on which he will grant it. Eternal happiness is the prize proposed to us by Jesus Christ, and the condition he exacts to put us in possession of it, is, that we should be just; but of such a justice as he himself means it; of a justice of which he alone is the judge, and consequently which is not to be understood nor regulated according to our human ideas, but according to his that are divine.

What was the justice of the Scribes and Pharisees? First, it was an exterior justice, whose principle was not in the heart. Secondly, it was an imperfect justice, that neglected the essential, and adhered to accessories. Thirdly, it was a justice which they imagined they could fulfil by their own strength, without standing in need of the help of grace. Fourthly, it was a justice inspired by motives of interest and vain glory. The Scribes and the Pharisees were the hypocritically just, and were in no concern about being such in the sight of God; provided they

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they appeared ſo before men. They were nice and ſcrupulous in the extreme in trifling obſervances, and gave no heed to the capital points of the law, ſuch as the love of God, and the love of their neighbour. They were proud, and gloried in their juſtice, as being their own; and far from glorifying God, they did not even imagine that he could be the author of it. Laſtly, they were vain and intereſted in their juſtice, by which they wiſhed to diſtinguiſh themſelves above others, to attract conſideration, to occupy the firſt places, and to enrich themſelves by impoſing upon widows, by an apparent piety.

Theſe Jewiſh devotees, theſe men who ſeparated themſelves from the crowd, and did not chuſe to have any thing in common with it, were, as it is well known, the great enemies of Jeſus Chriſt; it was they who perſecuted, calumniated, and condemned him to death. Jeſus Chriſt, on his part, made open war upon them, not on their perſons, but on their maxims and on their kind of devotion: he was full of compaſſion and indulgence towards humble ſinners; ſhewed upon all occaſions both indignation and rigour againſt thoſe haughty juſt. Upon all occaſions, he ſets his doctrine in oppoſition to that of thoſe falſe doctors; and the ſimplicity of his conduct, remote from all affectation,

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affectation, was a manifeſt condemnation of their oſtentation.

The juſtice which he recommends to his diſciples, and which can open to them the gates of heaven, muſt therefore have the four qualities that are oppoſite to pharifaical juſtice. The interior muſt be the foundation of it, and it muſt reſide in the heart. It muſt be perfect, and without omitting leſs things, it muſt chiefly adhere to things that are greater. It muſt be accompanied with humility, with a ſentiment of our own inſufficiency, and of the neceſſity of having continual recourſe to God by prayer. In ſhort, it muſt not be ſullied with any motive of intereſt or vanity, and muſt have no other view than the glory of God and the edification of our neighbour. Let us ſay a few words on theſe four qualities, of which, it may eaſily be perceived, that the three laſt depend upon the firſt.

That which at firſt ſtrikes us relative to theſe qualities, is a certain character of truth and of reaſon, which we cannot deny them. Before all reaſoning, and at the bare idea of juſtice, we perceive, that ſhould it be deficient in any one of theſe conditions, it is not a real juſtice: much leſs ſhould it be deficient in them all. We alſo perceive that according to ſound reaſon, the juſtice which God commands us to practiſe,

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practiſe, muſt be veſted with theſe qualities, and that he could not do otherwiſe than exact them.

To begin with the firſt; we eaſily conceive that men, in the obligations which they enjoin us, confine themſelves to the exterior and to bare outward effects: the public welfare requires nothing more: the ſecret diſpoſitions of the heart do not regard human legiſlators; they do not exact them, becauſe they cannot know them with certainty. Their laws are merely exterior; they would exceed their power if they enacted any others, and they would be infringed with impunity. In their eye we are ſuppoſed to be juſt, when we appear ſo to be; they inquire no farther, and it is always by the actions, and not by the intentions, that they judge their fellow-men.

But God, whom the exterior cannot deceive, goes further on; he attends to the interior; this he exacts above every thing elſe, and with this he is ſatisfied, when we add to it our exterior action. In the heart, he ſees the intention, the upright will, the ſincerity of the deſire; and this juſtice, which is perceived by him alone, is alſo the only juſtice that is pleaſing to him, the only juſtice that he conſiders as real and worthy of reward. It is by the heart that we walk in his preſence, by the heart that we are juſt before him. He has preſcribed to us exterior du-

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ties of juſtice, and he undoubtedly will have us fulfil them; but it is not for himſelf, nor to be aſſured of our inward ſentiments, that he commands our actions; upon which he ſets no farther value than as they proceed from our inward diſpoſitions.

Hence the firſt care of the chriſtian muſt be to obſerve the law of God in his heart; that is to ſay, to revere it, to love it, and to be ſincerely willing to practiſe it. If he has this reſpect, this affection and will, on the occaſion he will uſe the neceſſary endeavours to accompliſh what is commanded; he will uſe them to the full extent of his power; he will uſe them conſtantly; or ſhould he begin to relent, he will give proof that the inward principle is weakened.

Let us ſee if our juſtice has this firſt quality. Are we penetrated with reſpect for our chriſtian duties? do we love them? are we ſincerely willing to fulfil them? are we determined ſo to do, coſt what it will? With this view do we apply ourſelves to be well acquainted with them, and do we make the goſpel our chief ſtudy? If we pay due attention, we ſhall obſerve that moſt of its precepts immediately regard the heart, that they tend to reform and perfect it; and that even thoſe precepts that have an exterior object, ſuppoſe inward diſpoſitions, without which the action would be of

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no merit before God; ſuch as vocal prayer, and all exterior worſhip; ſuch as alms-deeds, and all works of charity.

It is therefore with reaſon that thoſe who underſtand well the goſpel, ſo ſtrongly recommend the interior, and never ceaſe repeating that without that there is no real piety, and no real juſtice; that on the contrary, the more we cultivate our interior, the more we are ſolidly virtuous. We cannot, therefore, examine ourſelves too much on this head, and to be well ſatisfied that our virtue is grounded upon this foundation, that we give to our interior our firſt care, and try to make daily progreſs in perfecting it. How many chriſtians have to reproach themſelves for more or leſs reſembling the Phariſees in this particular! How many know no more of piety than the outward practices of it, and have not the principle of it in their ſoul! and therefore God, who ſounds the hearts, what does he think of their juſtice? and what a miſ-reckoning for them, when they ſhall appear before him!

In the ſecond place, the juſtice, that God expects from us, muſt be perfect; that is to ſay, entire in all its parts; it muſt embrace all great things, and extend itſelf to the leaſt. As it would be defective, if neglecting little matters it ſhould only attend to great things; it is much more defective, if omitting great things,

it ſhould confine itſelf to the leaſt. With this Jeſus Chriſt frequently reproached the Phariſees; and it was upon their account that, diſtinguiſhing the eſſential precepts which they violated without ſcruple, from the ſmall obſervances which they practiſed even beyond the letter, he eſtabliſhed this beautiful rule: *Theſe things you ought to have done; and not to leave thoſe undone* *. The great precepts are of rigorous obligation, and muſt be obſerved preferably to all others. The ſmaller obſervances are not to be omitted, becauſe they are the complement and the perfection of the others. Thus in the chriſtian law, all duties are ſubordinate. Some are eſſential, which no motive whatſoever can ever diſpenſe with; there are others leſs intereſting, which we are always to obſerve when we can; but which we are to omit, or which ceaſe to oblige, in concurrence with others that are more important.

Can there be a rule more juſt? If chriſtian holineſs did not embrace even the ſmalleſt duties, it would not be worthy to have God for its author. If it did not place a certain order amongſt them, and did not give the preference to ſome over the others, it would not be conformable to the ſovereign reaſon. That therefore which conſtitutes the perfection of it is, that it omits nothing, and that it aſſigns to each

* Matt. xxiii. 23.

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each duty its proper rank according to its importance.

Is our conduct guided by this rule? Two ſorts of chriſtians deviate from it; one ſet, abiding by the letter of the law, are unacquainted with the ſpirit of it. Strict obſervers of certain exterior practices, that are good, it is true, but of a ſubaltern goodneſs, in that they conſtitute their juſtice, and fail in the eſſential obligations of charity, in neither loving God nor their neighbour. They are peeviſh, harſh, ſcornful, envious, back-biters, and calumniators; and frequently are ſuch through a falſe and ſimulated zeal for the glory of God, by which they pretend to juſtify the malignity of their heart. They reſemble the Phariſees, who made no ſcruple to purchaſe, with ready money, the blood of the innocent; and on Judas's returning it to them again, ſaid; *It is not lawful to put it into the treaſure of the temple, becauſe it is the price of blood* *. This kind of language is not very uncommon among falſe devotees, and people of party, who ſuffer themſelves to be blindly led away by prejudice and faction.

The other ſet, under pretext of adhering to the ſpirit of the law, often neglect the letter of it. They are for being juſt and holy in high ſtyle; and do not ſtop, ſay they, at minute things. But what they term minute, are points

* Matt. xxvii. 6.

points on which depends the perfect obſervance of objects of conſequence; and there is room to ſuſpect that they fail, or that they ſoon will fail in theſe, when they allow themſelves to neglect thoſe. Hence it is, that whoſoever habitually omits ſome certain practices of piety, the omiſſion of which may not be grievous in itſelf, will ſin ſooner or later againſt what is eſſential in the exterior worſhip: and in all communities, the infraction of the ordinary rules leads by degrees to the violation of vows, as diſſipation leads to a diſguſt of one's condition in life, and the ſmalleſt irregularities to the greateſt diſorders.

The third quality of chriſtian juſtice is, that it ſhould be accompanied with humility; that is, that we ſhould acknowledge that God is the chief Author of it; that it is he who firſt gives it us; and then maintains and augments it by his grace; without having on our part any thing more than a bare co-operation with the benign impreſſions with which he inſpires us; and even this very co-operation, though perfectly free, is due to the choice which he makes of his graces, and of the circumſtances in which he beſtows them. Hence we cannot, in truth, glory in our juſtice, as if it belonged to ourſelves; and all the glory reſulting from it ſhould be given to God, without whom we cannot do any thing in the order of ſalvation. In fact,

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as our deſtination is wholly gratuitous on the part of God, and ſupernatural, that is to ſay, ſurpaſſing the exigence of our nature; the proper means to elevate us to that end, are alſo ſupernatural; and we can neither be acquainted with them, nor procure them, nor make any uſe of them with our own ſtrength, eſpecially ſince the firſt ſin, which has diſordered and vitiated our nature. And therefore, even after that God has healed us through his pure mercy, we only have the power of accepting or of refuſing the means which he leaves to our diſpoſal. God acts in our regard the part of a phyſician, who preſcribes the remedy; who prepares it; who accommodates it to our wants; who preſents it, and invites us to take it, and who, notwithſtanding our repugnance, determines us towards it, by gently inclining our will. Can we, who were unacquainted with our malady, and were very far from thinking of having recourſe to the Phyſician, maintain, without the greateſt ingratitude, that we had cured ourſelves, becauſe we had taken the remedy that was given us? It is therefore with juſt reaſon that God exacts of us an humble acknowledgment of our inſufficiency in all that is good, and a hearty thankſgiving for whatever juſtice we may have.

Although this be the very eſſence of our religion, and though we profeſs a belief of it, our ſelf-love is not the leſs induſtrious to prompt us

us to glory in our feeble endeavours, to aſcribe our virtues to ourſelves, to applaud ourſelves for them; and, like the Phariſee, in the goſpel, to prefer ourſelves before others, and to forget that all comes from God. A monſtrous injuſtice is this, which is ſovereignly diſpleaſing to God, being the capital enemy of his glory.

This pride is more common among thoſe who have been preſerved from great failings, and have not experienced much temptation, than among great but converted ſinners who have had a long experience of their weakneſs, or among thoſe who have been violently tempted, and have found themſelves frequently on the brink of ruin. Almoſt all thoſe who confine their devotion to exterior practices, are ſubject to this vice; and the more faithful they are in diſcharging them, eſpecially if they be works of ſupererogation, the greater is the danger of their being proud of them. Let us dread the poiſon of pride, againſt which we do not ſufficiently guard ourſelves; let us pray to God that he would vouchſafe, by every manner of means, to preſerve us in humility.

Laſtly, the fourth quality of chriſtian juſtice is that it ſhould be above all motives of intereſt and vanity. It is a degrading of piety to make it ſubſervient to mercenary views, and to employ it as a mean of meliorating our fortune. Nor is it leſs debaſed, when upon that title we

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ſeek the applauſe of men, and aim at honourable diſtinctions. In every age there have been ſuch like Phariſees, full of oſtentation, deſirous of attracting the eyes of the public, ſounding aloud their good works, extolling themſelves with an affected modeſty, or engaging others to extol them, and conſidering as loſt whatever good they did, that was entirely unknown. In their intention it was undoubtedly loſt, becauſe it added nothing to their honour, or brought them no praiſe nor favour. Theſe falſe juſt *have received their reward*, ſays our Saviour, which is as vain as themſelves, and they have nothing to expect from my Father. God only acknowledges what is done for his ſake; and far from crowning theſe hypocrites, theſe mountebanks of piety, he will one day unmaſk them before the whole univerſe, and uncover their hidden turpitude, to their utmoſt ſhame and confuſion. What deſpair alſo will ſeize them, on ſeeing ſo many works that are loſt for ever, and for which the divine juſtice reſerves nothing but puniſhments. God preſerve us from being of this number.

Let us ſtudy to preſerve ourſelves from theſe defects, or rather from theſe vices, towards which we are but too much inclined. Jeſus Chriſt foreſaw it, and he has omitted nothing to guard us againſt them, by thundering ſo loudly and ſo frequently againſt falſe piety, although he

well knew that he ſhould fall a victim to his cenſures. I know of nothing that is more capable of inſpiring us with horror of every thing phariſaical, than to have always before our eyes, what the Saviour of the world experienced from that ſet of men.

O my divine Maſter, how intereſting are thy leſſons, and how many things are comprehended in every word that comes from thy mouth! In the vices of the Phariſees, which thou haſt ſo forcibly condemned, thou clearly ſheweſt me what I am to ſhun, and what I am to labour to become, in order to pleaſe thee. But, Lord, I am a Phariſee in my heart, and what man is not? Their vices are thoſe of our wretched nature. Thou who knoweſt them; thou who haſt perſonally ſuffered from them ſo much; thou whoſe death was the conſequence of them, as well as their remedy, heal me of this fatal malady; and ſince thou commandeſt me to co-operate in my cure, teach me to deteſt theſe vices, to fight againſt them, and to cleanſe myſelf entirely from them.

FIFTEENTH

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FIFTEENTH LESSON.

SIN IS COMMITTED IN THE HEART.

WHOSOEVER, ſays Jeſus Chriſt, *ſhall look on a woman to luſt after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart* *. It is not neceſſary that he ſhould accompliſh his criminal deſigns; it is ſufficient to have conceived it, and to caſt his eyes on a woman with that intention. The adultery is committed in ſecret: God and the conſcience of the guilty are witneſſes of it; and his crime, though unknown to men, will not eſcape the divine vengeance. What is true, relative to adultery and fornication, is equally true relative to all other ſins. The deſire alone renders us guilty before God, whether it be or be not followed with the execution; by the ſame reaſon that he ſets down to our account our good deſires, when it is not in our power to accompliſh them.

And this becauſe ſin is properly an act of the will, and becauſe the determination of committing it includes the whole malice of it. The exterior act conſidered in itſelf, and ſeparated from the evil intention, is ſomething purely phyſical, and contains no morality. If it adds any

* Matth. v. 28.

any malice to the deſign that is formed in the heart, it is becauſe it ſuppoſes a more determined and perſevering will, that has employed itſelf about the means of the execution; and which having found them, has made uſe of them, without paying attention to the conſequences, and paſſing over every conſideration both human and divine, which ought to have ſtopped it. Add to this the hurt which the ſin that is really committed does to our neighbour, the ſcandal it cauſes, the faults it occaſions, and the other pernicious effects which it does, or may bring along with it; effects for which the ſinner is reſponſible, and which, to the beſt of his power, he is obliged to repair. But obſerve even here, that what renders him more or leſs guilty, is the degree of knowledge, determination, and reflexion, which are things purely interior, of which God alone is witneſs and judge. It remains therefore true, that ſin is committed in the heart, and that it draws all its malignity from our inward diſpoſitions. All this is to be underſtood of a good action, which God appreciates and rewards according to the ſame rules. Should it ſeem hard that God ſhould puniſh the bare will, it ſhould ſeem to us conſoling that he accepts and rewards it: and on both ſides there is nothing but what is conformable to the moſt exact juſtice. Men would follow the ſame rule, could they judge of

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of the interior, and as much as they can, they try to approach it.

This leſſon of Jeſus Chriſt, ſo extenſive in its application, is of the utmoſt conſequence. We may conclude from it, in the firſt place, how holy the law of God is, that not only forbids every criminal action, but moſt ſeverely prohibits the very thought and deſire of it; for God takes equivalently for done what is inwardly conſented to: becauſe God's all-penetrating eye beholds this conſent, which is diſpleaſing and offenſive to him, and which he neceſſarily muſt puniſh.

Secondly, we may conclude how much it behoves us to watch over the motions and the affections of our heart, whoſe depravity becomes known to us as ſoon as we attain the uſe of reflection; of that heart which ſenſible objects ſo ſtrongly tempt and ſolicit to evil; of that heart which is the ſeat of ſo many paſſions, of ſo many vices and bad habits, which is ſo fertile in illicit thoughts and deſires, by which, when we enter into ourſelves, we find ourſelves continually ſurpriſed, and which inceſſantly return upon us, how careful ſoever we may be in driving them away.

Thirdly, we may conclude, that if the ſins that are exteriorly committed be very numerous, thoſe that are inwardly committed are much more ſo; and that the heart at every inſtant begets freſh ones,

ones, when once any paſſion takes poſſeſſion of it; the crime is its food, and as it were, its only reſpiration. Take what paſſion you pleaſe, either of love, avarice, ambition, envy, hatred, or revenge, is there any one of them that does not take up all our faculties, and that allows us to think of any thing beſides the gratifying of it? Every thing awakens it, and brings it to our remembrance; the whole ſoul is bent upon it; and its ſins multiply without number in thoughts and deſires. Who could reckon up thoſe of a day, of a week, of a month, of a year, of a long ſeries of a life ſpent under the ſlavery of the paſſions? The number of the hairs of our head is not to be compared with it. And yet none of theſe ſins have eſcaped God's notice. We hardly paid any attention to them, whilſt they were ſucceeding each other ſo rapidly in our heart; and we at moſt retain a confuſed remembrance of them. But God has ſeen them, and ſees them diſtinctly; he knows the degrees of malice of each one of them; and unleſs they be effaced by repentance, he will remember them, to puniſh them for ever. Yes, thoſe thoughts that paſſed by like lightning, thoſe deſires that hardly left the ſmalleſt track, and which we had loſt ſight of, are and will be eternally preſent to God, which he ever will hate, with which he ever will reproach us, and which he ever will avenge.

If

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If we were well perſuaded that ſin is, properly ſpeaking, the ſovereign, the only evil of man: becauſe all other evils, even thoſe of hell, are only the puniſhment of it: if at the ſame time we conſidered how eaſily our heart commits it, when unchecked by piety and the fear of God; if we conſidered that a thought, that an unlawful deſire is almoſt without intermiſſion replaced by another; and that they form a long chain that extends to both extremities of our life; if faith ſet before us the dreadful conſequences of one mortal ſin; much more ſo of a heap of ſins, the one more grievous than the other; becauſe the lights we receive, the habit we contract, and the obduracy of the will daily increaſe their malice, we ſhould be ſeized with horror, and become inſupportable to ourſelves.

Two things would throw us into the greateſt aſtoniſhment: our obſtinate perſeverance in offending God, and God's infinite patience in bearing with us, in waiting for us, in inviting us to repentance, in offering us his pardon, and all the riches of his mercy. Whilſt we have time, let us endeavour to fathom theſe two abyſſes of the malice of man, and the goodneſs of God, that we may quit the ſtate of ſin, or that we may preſerve ourſelves from it; that we may keep ourſelves in humility and in a diffidence of ourſelves; and that we may be

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be excited to love a God ſo good, ſo patient, and ſo merciful. If theſe truths do not ſtrike us here below; if inſtead of pondering them and profiting by them, we try to throw them aſide, and to forget them; we ſhall remember them in ſpite of us in the other life, in which they will cauſe both our torment and deſpair.

Alas! O Lord, how much have I hitherto been miſtaken in the ſtate of my ſoul before thee! I only reckoned my ſins by my actions; whilſt I had to ſum up the number of them from my intentions and deſires. Perhaps I may have thought myſelf innocent, or at leaſt not very guilty, becauſe I did not perceive great and frequent diſorders in my conduct; but with how many crimes has my heart been ſullied in thy ſight, only becauſe it wiſhed to commit them? At all times my ſentiments and my thoughts have been bent towards evil*; which I have loved, which I have ſought after, and of which I have made the habitual food of my mind.

To my ſhame and confuſion, ſhew me this innumerable multitude of inward ſins, ſuch as thou ſeeſt them thyſelf. Render me capable of ſupporting the ſight of them, frightful as it is. But whilſt thou diſcovereſt them, inſpire me with a keen repentance: may I accuſe myſelf of

* Gen. viii. 21.

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of them, firſt before thee, and next at the feet of thy miniſter, in all the detail that my memory can procure, when aſſiſted by thy light. May I deteſt, may I deplore, and may I expiate them; may I labour the remainder of life to purify this heart, that is an inexhauſtible ſource of iniquity. But with what other heart ſhall I purify mine, that is only filth and corruption? It ſhall be with the virtue of thine, O my Saviour! Thine is the furnace of divine love. Throw into me a ſpark of that ſacred fire, that burns and conſumes even the very root of all that is impure in me. Deſtroy this unhappy concupiſcence, this incentive to ſin, which I have brought with me into the world; and create in me a new heart, that only produces good thoughts and holy deſires, that ſpends itſelf in acts of devotion and gratitude, and that repairs by an ardent charity all the diſorders of cupidity.

SIXTEENTH

SIXTEENTH LESSON.

EVERY SINNER IS A SLAVE TO SIN.

It is a common prejudice, and an ordinary complaint, that the law of God hampers the liberty of man, by circumſcribing it within the precincts of certain duties, and by contracting it into narrow bounds, which he is not allowed to tranſgreſs. We are not free, it is ſaid, becauſe we cannot act as we pleaſe; the commands of God are ſo many ſhades; the ſinner that leaps over every bar, and ſtops at no fence, is more free than the righteous who attends always to the law without ever ſwerving from it. Thus worldlings ſpeak, and even thoſe chriſtians who, devoid of charity, only keep the commandments through motives of fear alone.

It is eaſy to anſwer, that as our liberty is God's gift, we ought only to uſe it according to the deſigns of his will; that he is maſter to ſubject it to laws; and that if it be pained by ſuch a ſubjection, we have no right to complain of it: becauſe in quality of dependant creatures, it appertains not to us to do as we pleaſe. But ſolid as this anſwer may be, there is another uttered by Truth itſelf, that more directly attacks the prejudice and complaint in queſtion.

Whoſoever

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Whoſoever committeth ſin, ſays our Lord, *is the ſervant of ſin* *. Far from being more free, he conſequently ſhackles his liberty; and the more he gives himſelf up to ſin, the more does he increaſe his bondage. Once Jeſus Chriſt has ſpoken, there is no room for diſcuſſion: it ſuffices that he has decided it in the manner the moſt clear and explicit. He makes no exception either of perſons or of the kinds of ſins; but he abſolutely pronounces, that whoſoever ſins, by that alone, enſlaves himſelf. Wherefore from his word, without farther reaſoning, I am authoriſed to conclude, that the more a man withdraws himſelf from ſin, and the more he binds himſelf to an exact obſervance of the divine law, the freer he is with the freedom which is that of the children of God.

Nevertheleſs as all the moral ſentences of our Saviour emanate from the ſovereign reaſon, he does not forbid us to employ with ſobriety the natural light he has given us, in examining the truth of his oracles; he even invites us to do it, and it is the beſt uſe we can make of our reaſon. Let us therefore ſee, in the firſt place, in what true liberty conſiſts: ſecondly, if the power of ſinning be a conſequence of the liberty which man has received from God: thirdly, if the exerciſe of this power be the ſame thing with the exerciſe of our liberty: fourthly, what is the ſlavery of

* Joan. viii. 34.

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of ſin: fifthly and laſtly, how when once we are engaged in this ſlavery, far from being able to free ourſelves from it, we enthral ourſelves more and more.

Where ſhall we take the idea of true liberty? In God himſelf, who is the ſource of it, and who is not only the moſt free of all beings, but the only eſſentially and abſolutely free Being. He receives no law from any one; he has no other rule to his will, but his will itſelf: whatever exiſts out of himſelf, only exiſts by him, becauſe he wills it, and ſuch as he wills it, and no ways can conſtrain his ſupreme independence. In him liberty is an infinite perfection, as well as all the others; it is a pure perfection, without any mixture of defect. Now God, who is infinitely free in all that he exteriorly operates, has only the choice of that which is good; he is not free with reſpect to evil, which he neither can will nor execute. His nature, and all his attributes, go againſt it; and he would ceaſe to be God, could it be otherwiſe. He therefore rejects evil through the neceſſity of his being, which is, of all neceſſities, the moſt invincible; which, far from impairing his liberty, conſtitutes the perfection and the excellency of it. It therefore is not true, that liberty carries with it in its notion the power of ſinning: on the contrary, perfect liberty, which is in God alone, abſolutely excludes that power; it is ſolely confined

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fined and determined to what is good, and which way ſoever it is exerciſed, it never can do any thing but what is good. It depends upon God outwardly to act or not, to act in ſuch or ſuch a manner, to chuſe out of ſuch or ſuch a thing that is good, to manifeſt ſuch or ſuch an attribute more than another; but his liberty never can extend to evil, and yet he is ſovereignly free.

Liberty conſidered in man is alſo a perfection; and even the moſt excellent of all his perfections. God who in this has created him to his own likeneſs, has given it him, in order to enable him to become morally good, righteous, and holy, and capable of the happineſs to which he has deſtined him by way of reward. The power, therefore, in man of ſinning, is not the conſequence of ſo excellent a gift, which flows from ſo pure a ſource, and is granted for an end ſo ſublime. If it were, God would be the author of that fatal power, which cannot be ſaid without blaſphemy. From whence then does it proceed, ſince it comes not from God, and of itſelf is not annexed to liberty? It comes from the imperfection that is inherent in the creature. The creature is drawn out of nothing, and on that account its will is not eſſentially upright and bent towards rectitude, as is the will of God; it is liable to fail, and can incline towards evil. Hence every intelligent and

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and free creature, that neceſſarily has duties to diſcharge in honour of its Creator, and that in diſcharging them renders itſelf worthy of the end to which it is called, is capable of failing in its duties, and of deviating from its end. This power is in itſelf a radical imperfection, which inſtead of being pleaſed at having it, we ought to lament and be humbled at it, and dread above all the exerciſe of, becauſe it would prove moſt fatal. Hence as liberty is perfect in God, becauſe it is impoſſible that he ſhould make a bad uſe of it; it is imperfect in the creature, becauſe through a defect that is interwoven in his nature, it may abuſe it; and by ſo doing, turn it againſt God and againſt itſelf.

From hence it evidently appears, that the exerciſe of the power of ſinning, is not the ſame thing with the exerciſe of our liberty. It is true, were I not free, I could not ſin, no more than I could do any good: but it is not preciſely becauſe I am free, that I ſin; it is becauſe I am capable from my nature of doing what is wrong. In the act itſelf, this capacity or power of doing wrong, which properly ſpeaking is only a defect, ſuppoſes the exerciſe of liberty, but it is ſomething that is different from it; it is the abuſe of liberty; it is the application which I make of it to an object, to which, in the intention of God, I ought not to apply it. I therefore

fore sin, because I have the power of turning myself towards evil; but I am not less free, when I abstain from sinning: I am even in that case more free, because I make a better use of my liberty, by making it resemble the liberty of God, and by rendering it subservient to the end for which it was given me.

From hence it follows that by sinning I weaken my liberty with respect to what is good, I strengthen it with respect to evil, and I deviate more and more from that equilibrium, which in the creature forms the perfection of it. I thereby become a slave to sin, the weight of which preponderates, and habitually holds my will in a fatal inclination to it. And what is the meaning of a slave to sin? It means a slave to sensible objects, which I suffer to assume a power over me that does not belong to them; to a woman, for example, in whose bonds I engage, and who captivates my liberty; to money, the desire and the possession of which master me to their obedience, and do not leave me free in the use I ought to make of them; to honours and to vain glory the ambition of which rules all my steps, and keeps me enslaved to false prejudices, and to the opinions of the public. It means a slave to my senses, by the impressions of which I am blindly led away; to my imagination, that prevails over reason, and does not allow me to listen to it; to my passions that sway

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me at pleaſure, and hurry me into extravagances, of which, on cool reflexion, I become aſhamed: to bad habits, which, when once contracted, become a ſecond nature, that I can ſcarcely maſter. It means, in a word, a ſlave of the devil, who lays faſt hold of, and fetters my will, and who is almoſt ſure of ſucceſs of his artful ſnares, and of the temptations he ſuggeſts. A moſt debaſing, heavy, and inſupportable ſervitude, which, whilſt it laſts, robs me at once of peace of mind and of heart, and commences my miſery here below, to perpetuate it hereafter.

Nevertheleſs under ſuch a general dependance I fancy myſelf free; I flatter myſelf that in every thing I follow my own will, whilſt I am actually a bond-ſlave to a crowd of tyrants. This dangerous and ſad illuſion is owing to the will itſelf that is of the party, that puts on its own chains, and with which it is pleaſed, at leaſt for a time. This is what makes us imagine that we are at our own diſpoſal, though in reality we are not. In fact, what a ſtrange liberty is that which is deaf to the voice of God, of reaſon, and of conſcience; which inceſſantly deviates from virtue, to follow evil ways: which is directly taken up with things that are baneful to its deſtination, which inſtead of rendering a man virtuous and happy, renders him wicked and wretched! Do we poſſeſs a thing more fully,

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fully, becauſe we continually abuſe it? Are we more independant, when having ſhaken off a juſt and honorable yoke, we undergo the unlawful and ſhameful one of tyranny? Such nevertheleſs is the condition of a ſinner, and his blindneſs goes ſo far, as to glory ſo much the more in his liberty, as he is the more enſlaved.

But let us follow the march and the progreſs of this ſervitude. When a chriſtian, after having lived ſome time in innocence and in the obſervance of the divine law, yields to the allurements of ſin, and begins to taſte the falſe ſweets of it, I allow that at firſt he thinks himſelf more free, becauſe he opens to himſelf a new career: but at the ſame time he ſhuts againſt himſelf the one he was in before; and if his liberty extends to new objects, it is only by renouncing others, about which it is no longer employed. Hence, what on the one hand it gains, if it be a gain, it loſes on the other.

But matters are ſoon going to alter. Sin, ſo attracting and pleaſing at firſt eſſay, gradually fetters the will; which finds, not without ſome uneaſineſs, that it no longer can leave it. Not that ſin has acquired new charms; on the contrary, it has daily fewer. But its liberty is weakened, and cannot eaſily draw back. A kind of an almoſt irreſiſtible force drags us along in the path of iniquity, and continually hurries us into greater lengths. An habit is contracted;

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that which at firſt was more voluntary, becomes at laſt almoſt quite mechanical; the firſt impreſſion of the object nearly forces conſent, and we ſay that we are no longer free to refuſe it; and on that account we pretend excuſe. Grace acts, conſcience ſpeaks, and remorſes are felt: we are even tired, diſguſted, and wearied with what formerly ſeemed delightful. But ſin is the ſtrongeſt, it commands and muſt be obeyed. We ſin, no longer with a free determination, but becauſe we can hardly do otherwiſe. We groan under this fatal neceſſity, and wiſh to break our chains; but it is no longer time; in ſpite of us we muſt drag them even to the grave, unleſs God come to our aſſiſtance.

Sinners, boaſt now of your liberty. Whilſt the path of the commandments of God widens daily to the righteous man, whilſt the more he advances in it, the more pleaſing it becomes; to you the path of ſin continually grows narrower, and daily becomes more laborious and painful; you repent, but in vain, that you ever engaged in it. The faithful chriſtian feels that his liberty is developed and increaſed by the practice of virtue; all reluctances vaniſh, all difficulties are removed, and pleaſure ſucceeds pain. As to you, it is quite the reverſe; you begin with pleaſure, and end in pain; from the habit you have formed, ſin becomes inſipid;

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you ſwallow it like water, without the leaſt reliſh; you even experience a certain repugnance in yielding to it, and are in deſpair that you cannot withdraw from it. St. Auguſtin, from ſelf-evidence, has perfectly delineated this unhappy ſtate; and every inveterate ſinner, unleſs decidedly impious, muſt yield to the truth of it.

The moment in which the ſinner feels moſt the loſs of his liberty is, when ſtrongly urged by grace, he ſees the diſorder and the danger of his ſituation, and forms the deſign of quitting it. What conflicts! what inward ſtruggles! what attacks! what reſiſtance! what reſolutions a hundred times taken, and a hundred times retracted! He would, and he does not will; he takes ſome ſteps towards his converſion, and then he draws back; he ſtrives to riſe up, and falls down again more heavily: not unlike a man plunged in mire, who having nothing to hold by, ſinks ſtill deeper, as he ſtruggles to get out. There are always delays: to-morrow, to-morrow; never to-day, never at this moment He has not the ſtrength to determine to give this conſent, without which there can be no converſion: yet he wiſhes to give it, but with an inefficacious deſire; he reproaches his will, but he is no longer maſter of it; he ſheds tears through vexation and rage; and withal he does not change, and abſolutely never will, un-

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leſs God in his mercy unſhackle his liberty. There is not therefore in morality, a more certain maxim, than that of Jeſus Chriſt, that he who commits ſin is a ſlave to ſin. This is not the place to ſpeak of the diſmal conſequences of ſuch ſlavery. We well know that it leads to final impenitence, and then to hell.

Here let every one make his prayer, and place himſelf in the diſpoſitions that are ſuitable to the ſtate he is in. If he has had the happineſs of being preſerved from the ſervitude of ſin, by not having contracted the habit of it, let him give thanks to God; but let him watch over himſelf, leſt he ſhould unfortunately experience the ſad effects of that habit; be it known to him, that venial ſin deliberately committed, leads to mortal ſin; and that one ſingle fall is ſufficient to give birth to habit: becauſe, once we have fallen, it is not in our power to riſe again. If at this preſent moment he be a ſlave to ſin, let him lift up his hands to God; let him humbly implore his aſſiſtance; let him faithfully execute whatever he ſhall be inſpired with by grace; let him not be diſheartened; let him not deſpair; let him wait with confidence and patience for his delivery. Solid converſions, in general, come on by degrees. Finally, if after having been for a long while a ſlave, he has broken through his chains, let him ſing to God, the remainder of his days,

a canticle

a canticle of gratitude: but let him remember that the more he has received from grace, the more he ought to return by a generous fidelity; for the ſmalleſt neglect might occaſion in him a relapſe ſtill more dangerous, and perhaps irremediable.

SEVENTEENTH

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SEVENTEENTH LESSON.

THE TRUTH MAKES US FREE.

THE truth ſhall make you free *, ſaid our Saviour to the Jews. The carnal Jews did not underſtand the ſenſe of this ſaying; they underſtood it of a freedom from a temporal ſervitude; and according to this interpretation, they looked upon it as falſe and injurious to their nation. They therefore replied: *We have never been ſlaves to any man.* They ought, however, to have underſtood, that our Lord ſpoke to them of a more exalted and of a quite ſpiritual deliverance, as it was to be the effect of the truth. We have no reaſon to be ſurpriſed at the ignorance and blindneſs of the Jews; although chriſtians, we are in general neither leſs ignorant nor blind: and when the ſame words occur to us in the goſpel, which are equally addreſſed to us, we hardly underſtand them better. Yet a full knowledge of them is of the utmoſt conſequence to us all. What then is the truth? What does it free us from? How does it affect this freedom? and what muſt

* Joan. viii. 32.

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muſt we do on our part, in order to ſecond its operation?

The truth, is God himſelf. But God in his own nature, is too much above our reach: our minds are incapable of thus contemplating the truth in its own eſſence; they would immediately be dazzled and loſt in it. Beſides, this contemplation would be barren, nor would it enable us to make any juſt application. Witneſs the abſtracted ſpeculations of the Platonians, as well as thoſe of the ſcholaſtics, on the divine nature. What moral rules do they draw from them? And what benefit accrues from the ſublimeſt knowledge, unleſs it tend to the regulation of our morals? That the truth therefore might be uſeful to us, it has manifeſted and rendered itſelf ſenſible in the perſon of Jeſus Chriſt, who ſays of himſelf: *I am the Truth*; and who in direct terms declares it to the Jews on the ſame occaſion, when he ſays: *If the Son ſhall make you free, you ſhall be free indeed* *.

In veſting itſelf with our nature, the truth has approached towards us; it has proportioned itſelf to our weakneſs, by lowering itſelf to our level; it has placed its inſtructions within our reach, by its examples, which it has rendered palpable, and by his grace, which renders them imitable. We, therefore, ſince the coming

* Joan. viii. 36.

coming of Jeſus Chriſt, have nothing more to wiſh for, for the regulation of our lives; becauſe in him we find the truth, and a truth that is not leſs calculated for the heart than for the mind. An acceſſible truth, that temperates its ſplendour, and diſcloſes its charms in ſuch a manner, as to enable us to contemplate them without either effort or fear; a truth which every kind of motive induces us to imitate; becauſe it is a God-Man in which it ſhews itſelf, and becauſe to the moſt ſimple and familiar leſſons, and to the moſt perſuaſive and moving examples, it joins the moſt powerful helps.

What does this truth free us from, if we take it for our guide? It frees us from our errors. Morality, which is properly the ſcience of man, the ſcience which intereſts him the moſt to be acquainted with, the ſcience which through virtue leads him to happineſs, is the ſcience of which he knows the leaſt, even when he flatters himſelf that he is the moſt verſed in it. The vulgar who do not ſtudy it, and who have no other light than a certain inſtinct and a ſcantily cultivated reaſon, are leſs liable to go aſtray than the proud philoſopher, who is for fathoming it with his own reflections, and for reducing it into ſyſtem. He does not reſt it on its real baſis; he is ignorant of moſt of its principles; and from thoſe of which he may have a glimpſe, he draws falſe conſequences; he never rightly hits

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hits upon the drift and the end of it. The ſubject of happineſs, which human reaſon never has been able to clear, and on which the ſages of antiquity have fruitleſsly diſputed, furniſhes an evident proof, that morality is not within the reach of our natural lights alone, and that revelation is neceſſary, before we can comprehend it. For the juſt idea of happineſs is the key of this ſcience; happineſs is the term to which it tends; and its object is to teach us the means of attaining it. Now read as much as you pleaſe both ancient and modern moraliſts, who on writing on this ſubject have only conſulted their own reaſonings, and have ſet aſide the revealed truth, you will find in none of them neither an exact definition of happineſs, or a ſure indication of the way that leads to it.

But what is a wiſdom that is deceived in theſe two points, on which it fancies itſelf the moſt knowing, but a falſe, illuſory, inſane and preſumptuous wiſdom, that at every ſtep ſtrays farther from the truth, and becomes ſo much the leſs able to find it, as it is obſtinate in the ſearch of it. And if ſuch has been, if ſuch ſtill is the blindneſs of the greateſt geniuſes, of thoſe who have given themſelves out for the teachers of mankind, what muſt the blindneſs be of their diſciples, who decide upon their authority, and ſwear to their word? The ignorant multitude, as I have ſaid, are not ſo liable

to their going aſtray; becauſe, as they reaſon leſs, they do not pervert the firſt leſſons of nature; they more eaſily recover their wanderings, becauſe the paſſions have more ſhare in them than the mind; and their ignorance, which they readily own, renders them more ſuſceptible of inſtruction, when they fall into good hands. But in other reſpects, what ſtupidity, what ſlavery of their ſenſes are they not ſubject to! What difficulty do they not find in raiſing themſelves up to any ſpiritual idea! What can prevent their being led away by ſeduction! and when once ſeduced, to what extremities do they go, liſtening only to their brutal paſſions, and uncontrouled by any kind of reflexion.

Let both the learned and the ignorant liſten to Jeſus Chriſt; they will be freed from their errors, their doubts and uncertainties on the eſſential points of morality, in beginning from the point happineſs: they will be ſurely and perfectly inſtructed in all they ought to know and practiſe. The goſpel on theſe objects is eaſily underſtood; beſides, the church has never wanted enlightened and pious maſters to explain it.

The truth will free us from our prejudices: the world teems with them; we find them eſtabliſhed when we come into it; we ſuck them in with our milk, and they are the baſe on which our education is founded. There are prejudices that are general, prejudices that appertain

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pertain to ranks and conditions, prejudices of bodies of men, and prejudices that are perſonal. In what country do not people reaſon, judge, and conduct themſelves otherwiſe than according to prejudices? What man is exempt from them? what mind, what character has ſtrength enough to guard againſt them or to ſhake them off? Before we are able to appreciate what riches and honours are, we are taught to prize them, to hold in eſtimation thoſe who poſſeſs them, and to look upon them as happy; we are taught to be proud of our birth, ſhould it be illuſtrious, and to be aſhamed of it, if it be obſcure; to judge of merit not from perſonal qualities, but from rank, diſtinction, privileges, and reputation. We are taught to reſpect the world and its opinions, to be gentle with it, to fear it, to live according to its maxims and cuſtoms, and to make it a falſe point of honour in not deviating from them. Theſe prejudices, which are numberleſs, and which even extend to the goſpel and practices of piety, being rooted in the ſoul, rule our whole life. It is not an eaſy matter for the truth to free us from them; in fact, there are very few whom it perfectly frees; becauſe we either do not liſten to it, or are unwilling to follow it in all its branches. For it is evident that whoſoever conſults Jeſus Chriſt on what he ſhould think of things, muſt have his mind free from all kind

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of prejudice; and if, through weakneſs, he ſhould chance to yield to any, he will condemn himſelf for it, as a prevarication.

The truth frees us from the illuſion of the ſenſes, which deceive us by ſurfaces and appearances, and prepoſſeſſes us in favour of preſent objects, as if they were the only real bleſſings; and that the objects to come, that are propoſed to us by faith, were only chimerical: from the illuſion of the imagination, that equally deceives us, by enchanting or frightful pictures which it ſets before us; that amuſes or occupies us with a thouſand vain projects, entertains us with falſe hopes or fears, and torments us with the promiſe of rendering us happy: from the illuſion of the mind, which by giving us a favourable opinion of our own merit, makes us believe that we are capable of every thing, that we may aſpire to, and ſucceed in every thing; which ſwells us with preſumption and vanity; which leads us to a neglect of ſolid talents, in order to cultivate others that are more brilliant and frivolous; which fills us with arrogance, diſdain, and contempt of thoſe who do not do us juſtice; that is, who do not think in our regard as we think of ourſelves; makes us dupes to praiſes of a mean and intereſted adulation: from the illuſion of the heart, which, being prone to ſelf-deception by taking that to be true which flatters, and that to be good

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good which pleaſes, and that to be bad which it diſlikes, adheres to perſons and to things more through taſte and fancy, than from reaſon; and in like manner ſets them aſide; and liſtening only to a blind ſentiment, is impatient of being undeceived. Neither the advice of others, nor our own reflections, will free you from ſo many illuſionss, which you do not perceive, and which you are unwilling to acknowledge. It is neceſſary that the truth itſelf ſhould enlighten you, and diſpel them by means of its light. You only perſevere in them, becauſe you refuſe to conſult it. Not ſatisfied with freeing us from this heap of errors, prejudices, and illuſions, the truth aſcends to the ſource; and if we be docile, it will free us from our paſſions and vices, from pride and ſelf-love. Philoſophy has attempted to preſcribe remedies for the paſſions, but authourity was wanting in them to make them go down; and thoſe who preſcribed them, annulled their fine precepts by their wicked examples. As to the vices, philoſophy know how to define them, how to paint their deformity, and how to point out their ridicule and exceſſes; but it went no farther; and in general thoſe grave maſters of morality were not leſs vicious and perverſe than others. Beſides, it is well known how powerfully they were ruled by pride and ſelf-love, and how ſovereignly they deſpiſed the reſt of their

their fellow-men; the moſt zealous among them in favour of virtue, imagined that it was in their own power to acquire it, and thought it needleſs to apply for it to the deity; and their ſeeming progreſs in the practice of it, only rendered them more proud and more ſelf-conceited.

It was therefore neceſſary that the truth ſhould come down upon earth, to teach man to hate and deny himſelf, continually to war upon himſelf, and at the ſame time to acknowledge that he could not conquer without the help of a ſupernatural aſſiſtance, to beg it of God by humble prayer, and to aſcribe to him all the honour of his victories.

But how does the truth ſet us free? In a manner that it is impoſſible to explain; it is a ſecret which it keeps to itſelf. Without the leaſt infringement of our liberty, it acts upon the mind, and alters our ideas; it acts on the heart, and gives it new diſpoſitions: all on a ſudden, we become new men; we eſteem what we deſpiſed; we deſpiſe what we eſteemed; we love what we abhorred; we abhor what we loved. It is in the very bottom of the ſoul, where, with as much gentleneſs as efficacy, this wonderful change is effected; it takes place in an inſtant; and if we afterwards faithfully correſpond with it, it produces the moſt deſirable effects both for our perfection and happineſs.

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The malady has ceaſed; we are in full convaleſcence; and to recover that firſt health which ſin had deprived us of, we need only follow the regimen which the truth preſcribed to us. For the truth, when once it has ſhewn itſelf, and we have embraced it, no longer abandons us; it helps us ſucceſſively to ſhake off our bonds, and in the long run ſets us entirely free. At leaſt this is the deſign, which if it be not accompliſhed, it is by want of our due correſpondence with it.

The radical change, which is the eſſential, is effected in us, without our concurrence; but the alterations that follow require our co-operation; without which we loſe even our firſt grace, and become worſe and greater ſlaves than before. The example of Saul is a ſtriking inſtance of this *. Samuel, after having conſecrated him king, announced to him that he was going to be changed into another man; in fact he was ſo; and at the very moment that he left Samuel, *God*, ſays the Scripture, *gave him another heart* †. Behold him, enlightened, guided, and animated by the truth; he ſucceeded in every thing, and whilſt he conſulted but the truth, God proſpered his enterpriſes. He twice diſobeys Samuel, who to him was the organ of the truth; the ſpirit of God leaves him; an evil ſpirit ſeizes him; he becomes jealous

* 1 Kings x. 6. † Ibid. 9.

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jealous of David's glory, that reflected upon him, and throughout his whole reign, all his thoughts are employed about the means of deſtroying him. From time to time, the light makes its appearance; he ſees it, but does not follow it, and finally he is loſt.

When therefore the truth ſhall have effected in us a change like that in Saul; if we mean to be ſet at full liberty, we muſt inſeparably adhere to it, and give it an abſolute ſway over our whole conduct. We muſt embrace it in the entire, and conſult it in every thing. We muſt liſten to it when it inſtructs us; we muſt love it when it reproves; and obey it when it commands: we muſt not expect it will flatter us, or overlook our defects; if it did, it would not be inflexible and incorrupt; if it could have any complaiſance for our vices, or even for our ſmalleſt imperfections, it would not be the Truth. As it is infinitely wiſe, it accommodates itſelf to our weakneſs, by its various degrees of correction, and by the imperceptible manner in which it enlightens and heals us. But we muſt always follow it; it ſuffers no ſtoppage; it loves us too tenderly to free us, but by halves. O how free, how happy ſhould we be, were we to allow it an abſolute diſpoſal of our heart!

But of all our evils, the moſt univerſal and the moſt deplorable is, that we do not love the truth;

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truth; we are fraid to know it, we ſhun it and even hate it when it ſhews a ſevere countenance, when it reproaches our faults, and preſcribes for us remedies that are diſagreeable to nature. At firſt we turn away our own eyes, that we may not ſee it; we ſhut our ears that we may not hear it; ſhould it ſpeak aloud, ſhould it preſs upon us, we reſiſt and repel it, we affect not to know it; and falſe reaſons are never wanting to lead us into a perſuaſion that it is not the truth that ſpeaks. It does not drop the purſuit; for a long time it renews the attack, by aſſuming every ſhape and employing every means to win us. But at laſt the moment comes, which moment the truth alone knows, in which our rebellion and obſtinacy irritate and force it to forſake us. We then applaud ourſelves for being freed from its importune admonitions; and do not ſee that, abandoned and condemned by our heavenly Phyſician, we muſt irremediably periſh.

O thou incarnated Truth, thou Truth that haſt done incomprehenſible prodigies to abaſe thyſelf down to us, and to induce us to love thee; in what manner ſoever thou dealeſt with me, never permit me to miſtake or to hate thee. What would become of me, were I to go to ſuch a pitch of blindneſs and folly! by hating thee, I could not hurt thee, but I ſhould thereby diſpleaſe thee and loſe myſelf. O rather grant me

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to cherish thee even when thou seemest bitter; and when thou reprimandest, may I only consider thy zeal and affection for me. Wouldst thou be interested in my progress and happiness, wert thou silent on my vices? Assume all the authority over me that belongs to thee, and exercise it as thou pleasest. Deliver me from all my miseries, which I neither know, nor can know, nor yet be freed from, but by thee. Whether thou speakest inwardly to my heart, or makest use of the ministery of men, I shall think myself happy to hear and to follow thy voice. I should deem it the greatest of misfortunes to force thee, through my indocility, to abandon me. Be thou my Teacher and my sovereign upon earth, and after having freed me from sin and the corruption of nature, grant me to contemplate and to love thee eternally in the kingdom of perfect liberty. *Amen.*

EIGHTEENTH

EIGHTEENTH LESSON.

WHOSOEVER DOES EVIL, HATES THE LIGHT.

ONE of the moſt important ſentences of morality is that of Jeſus Chriſt to Nicodemus: *Every one that doth evil, hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved* *. Our actions, whether good or bad, are liable upon earth to three kinds of judgments; to that of God, to our own, and to that of other men. God judges them with a light, which is no other than his ſupreme truth, and intimates his judgment to our conſcience; we judge them with the light of reaſon, which either approves or condemns them: other men in like manner, when they come to their knowledge, judge them according to the appearance of goodneſs or of malice which they offer to their view. Beſides theſe lights, which are common to all men, the chriſtians have thoſe of the goſpel and of inward grace. He who does a good action cannot hate any of theſe lights, becauſe they are the rule of his conduct; nor does he fear any of theſe judgments, as he has all reaſon to think that they are favourable. He

* Joan. iii. 20.

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He acts with confidence under the eyes of God: far from ſhunning his looks, he reflects with pleaſure that God ſees him, and feels comfort from the good teſtimony which the divine light gives to his conſcience. Far from ſeeking to ſubtract his action from the judgment of reaſon, he conſults it before he acts, and ſecures its approbation. As to other men, though he ambitions not their ſuffrage, ſhould he be humble, he has no intereſt to hide himſelf from them, and has nothing to apprehend from their being acquainted with his conduct: becauſe if they be equitable, they muſt needs praiſe, and ſhould they be otherwiſe, their praiſes or their cenſures are alike indifferent.

This is not the caſe with him who does evil. He hates the light of God, that inwardly condemns him; he hates the light of reaſon, that pronounces againſt him; he hates the light of other men, who being impartial judges in actions not their own, readily diſapprove thoſe that are bad. This requires ſome ſort of explication.

Properly ſpeaking, we do no evil but in as much as we know it, and determine ourſelves towards it, with ſome degree of reflection. Now whereſoever there is malice, either in an action, or in the cauſe or occaſion of it, it is morally impoſſible that we ſhould not hear both before and after, the voice of conſcience which is the voice of God,

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God, whoſe admonitions and reproaches have for their object to prevent us from acting wrong, or to excite our repentance. Before the action, he diverts us from it by reaſons that are taken from thegrievouſneſs of the ſin, and from its conſequences: after the action, he purſues with keen remorſes, and allows us no repoſe. He therefore, who determinately wills the evil, and does it, conſequently hates the divine light, becauſe it ſtops him, and puts an obſtacle to his wiſhes; he hates it, becauſe having perceived it, and knowing that he is obliged to follow it, he can expect no other than his own condemnation for having contemned and rejected it; he hates it, becauſe, after having executed his deſign, it deprives him of his tranquillity, and ceaſes not to torment him; he hates it, becauſe he conſiders it to be the enemy of his happineſs; he could wiſh never to ſee it again, he ſhuns it and turns from it, and that he may the more freely be gratified, he goes even ſo far as to wiſh that it did not exiſt.

He hates not leſs the light of his reaſon. When he delights in evil, his firſt care is to ſet aſide all inſtruction on his part, all counſel and all ſalutary reflection; he liſtens only to his paſſions, to his imagination, and the corrupt deſires of his hear; the ſilences his reaſon, both before and after his ſin; he tries to ſhun thought, and ſeeks diſſipation; and were it in his power,

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he would divest himself of the quality of rational being, and would reduce himself to the instinct of the brute, whose condition he envies.

As to his fellow-men, if they be wise and virtuous, he equally hates them: he carefully conceals from them his actions, and takes every precaution to remove from them the smallest suspicion. He opens and trusts himself only to those who think as he does, who are the accomplices and the companions of his disorders. Before every one else he counterfeits his dispositions; he excuses and justifies himself, and would feel undone were he known for what he is. From hence springs his shame, when he finds he is detected, when his conduct is exposed to public censure; from hence also comes his rage against those in whose countenance he reads his own condemnation. O thou moral instinct of man, how deeply art thou rooted in his breast! how indestructible art thou? and how wretched is he when he does not follow thee! thou manifests thyself in him from his earliest years, nor dost thou wait for maturity of age to make him feel thy inevitable power. Hardly has he the idea of evil, hardly does he conceive the desire of it, than he is forced to hide himself from the face of heaven, of the earth, and from his own, in order to commit it. What does this mean, unless it be that he has engraved in his very nature that whosoever is

is guilty, cannot avoid being condemned; and that every tribunal, whether of God, of his own reaſon, or of the univerſe, pronounce againſt him? It is not therefore poſſible for him to diſguiſe to himſelf that all evil is odious and puniſhable, and no where finds a defender. And yet he loves it, he commits it, perſiſts in it, takes a habit of it, grows grey in it, and conſents to die in it. What a ſtate! what a life! what a death! Is he not ſovereignly wretched? and does he not carry about with him an anticipated hell?

Let us now ſee into what precipices he is led by his hatred of the light, which ſoever way it preſents itſelf before him. He daily conceives a greater averſion from it, in proportion as he perſeveres in evil, and ſinks deeper into it. At firſt he but faintly oppoſed it; he frequently yielded to it, repented his reſiſtance, and was pleaſed at having followed it. He again forſook it, returned to it anew, and promiſed never more to forſake it. But at laſt, the paſſions having taken the lead, and the will being entirely on their ſide, he forms the unhappy reſolution of ridding himſelf of all importunate light.

To begin by conſcience, not ſatisfied with driving away all remorſe, by leading a diſſipated life, and by ſhunning whatever might bring him home to reflection, he labours to deprive it of its

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its authority, and to ſhake the foundations on which it reſts. The chief foundation of conſcience, is revealed religion. He leaves off the practices of it: for him there is no more worſhip, no more ſacraments, nor ſermons, nor ſpiritual reading, nor prayer. He rejects the myſteries and the dogmas of it, on the pretence of their incomprehenſibility: they are above his reaſon; his reaſon is made to take every thing in; therefore thoſe myſteries and dogmas are ſo many impoſtures. He attacks the proofs of it that are of fact, ſuch as miracles and prophecies; he allows himſelf to doubt and to reaſon upon them; he forges to himſelf objections, which in his own mind he ſets down as demonſtrations. In default of ſolid reaſons, he has recourſe to the weapons of ridicule, and applauds himſelf for his blaſphemous pleaſantries, as for ſo many unanſwerable arguments; becauſe, in fact, they deſerve no other anſwer than contempt. He therefore is now at reſt, with reſpect to revelation; that great light is from henceforth ſet aſide with regard to him, at leaſt he flatters himſelf that it is: hell no longer terrifies him; the thought of which formerly wonderfully tormented him.

But if he be tranquil with reſpect to religion, he is not as yet ſo in regard to reaſon. The light of the natural law inceſſantly preſents itſelf before him and condemns him: this alſo muſt

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muſt be made to diſappear. The cry of reaſon is, that there is God and a providence; that the human will is free; that the notions of virtue and vice are not vain; that there exiſts a moral good and evil; that our ſoul is ſpiritual, and does not periſh with the body; that conſequently there is another life, and that the wicked will not eſcape the divine vengeance. Then revelation returns upon him anew, and preſſes him with all its weight. He is therefore under the neceſſity of giving the lie to reaſon, and reducing it to ſilence, on all thoſe particulars. This is not ſo eaſily effected, as the proofs of thoſe firſt truths are moſt cogent and evident. He, however undertakes it, becauſe he is unable to ſuſtain ſuch a light, and becauſe the neceſſity of juſtifying his paſſions leads him to that. He therefore throws himſelf into ſyſtems, as extravagant as impious, of materialiſm and fatality; he admits of a world exiſting without a cauſe, of a motion without a primary mover, of a ſtable order without an ordering intelligence, and of a ſeries of generations without a beginning. To him every thing becomes the effect of chance, a mere empty word, and of a fortuitous concurrence of imaginary atoms, which, each one ſeparately, do not think, do not feel, and do not will; but of which the re-union, the organization, and the motion produce thought, ſenſa-

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tion, and volition. He loſes himſelf in his ſuppoſitions, ſubtleties, and ſophiſms; he ſwallows down the moſt palpable contradictions and the moſt manifeſt abſurdities, and thus becomes devoid both of conſcience and reaſon. But does he loſe both the one and the other? and is he never to have a ſight of them any more? No; that is impoſſible; nor do I even believe, that with all his endeavours, he can bring himſelf to doubt for an inſtant of the truths I have been mentioning.

He does not, however, publiſh leſs loudly that he has obtained conviction; that he is cured of all the vain terrors and falſe prejudices, to which the vulgar are both the dupe and the victim; he boaſts, at leaſt, that he is in the happy ſtate of Pyrrhoniſm, of indifference and of unconcernedneſs. He ſpeaks, he writes, and ſeeks to make proſelytes, that he may extinguiſh in others the light that condemns him: for he cannot ſee with indifference that others ſhould think otherwiſe than himſelf; thoſe who declare themſelves to be of an oppoſite ſentiment to his, are ſo many accuſers who depoſe againſt him. To him their bare preſence is a torment that racks him. If he cannot gain them to his party, he becomes their greateſt enemy. This is the foundation of the hatred which vice at all times has vowed againſt virtue.

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You acknowledge and reſpect as divine, a goſpel in which I read againſt me the ſentence of an eternal death; you alſo read it; you think it juſt, and you ſubſcribe to it; how can I but hate you; how can I but wiſh to deſtroy you, if you do not eſpouſe my cauſe? You adore a God-Man, Jeſus Chriſt, whoſe arm is lifted to cruſh me; and who, if I die impenitent, will not, and cannot forgive me. How can I poſſibly love you, whilſt at this preſent time you join with him againſt me; and will one day applaud his wrath, and my eternal ruin? You admit of a God, of a providence, of a free will, and the like. But I have nothing but evils to expect hereafter, ſhould thoſe things be true; and it is my greateſt intereſt that they ſhould be falſe. Can I ſympathize with you, can I do otherwiſe than hate you to death, when you ground your moſt pleaſing hope on what entails upon me an endleſs and irremediable miſery? I will not believe in virtue, becauſe I have abjured its practice; and you force me to pay it homage and reſpect it. Your conduct riſes up againſt mine, and renders me inexcuſable even to myſelf. Can I bear with you, can I pardon you for being virtuous? Either think and act as I do, who am reſolved never to alter, or I ſhall unrelentingly purſue in you that odious light that pronounces my condemnation.

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Thus ſays the impious in his heart; and if his rage againſt the true believers be not at all times openly avowed, it is owing to his want of power and opportunity. We have lately experienced what the ſect of our falſe philoſophers is capable of, of thoſe grand partiſans of tolerance and humanity, when they thought themſelves the ſtrongeſt: their language no longer will impoſe upon any one, after the reflexed and combined barbarity of their actions. By this dreadful exploſion of their fury, what elſe have they done, but to verify the oracle of Jeſus Chriſt: *Whoſoever does evil, hates the light*, and ſtrives to annihilate it in every one that ſets it before him.

O my Saviour! preſerve me from being of the number of thoſe wretches, who hate every light, becauſe their works are evil: they judge and reprobate themſelves, becauſe their own reaſon riſes up in judgment againſt them. Alas! when I bring to mind my former wanderings, I ſee that I tried as they did, to juſtify them. If I have not gone ſo far, if I have not been buried into an abyſs of darkneſs, may immortal thanks be given unto thee. I have ſtroven to blind myſelf; but thy light has ſaved me from my fatal endeavours. It has ſhewed itſelf ſo beautiful and attractive, ſo powerful and pleaſing, that at laſt it has won me; and has made me bluſh at being any longer its enemy. *O true Light,*

Light, that enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world *, lift me up direct, and conduct me to thee; and that I may ever love thee, grant me grace to love, and ever to practise virtue. *Amen.*

* Joan. i. 9.

NINETEENTH.

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NINETEENTH LESSON.

WE CANNOT SERVE TWO MASTERS.

No man can ſerve two maſters *, ſays Jeſus Chriſt. For this it is ſufficient that their wills ſhould be ſometimes different, and that their orders ſhould claſh. Much more ſo ſhould they be mutual enemies, ſhould they have oppoſite wills, and ſhould give contrary orders, as our Saviour ſuppoſes. *For*, he adds, *he either will hate the one, and love the other: or he will ſuſtain the one, and deſpiſe the other. You cannot ſerve God and Mammon.* What our Lord ſays of the love of money or of avarice, is equally applicable to all the other vices to which mankind are ſubject. Thoſe vices become our maſters, when we ſuffer ourſelves to be enſlaved by them, and a compliance with their demands is incompatible with the ſervice of God.

But to avoid entering into any particular detail, and to bring them all under one notion that includes them all, I ſay that we cannot at once ſerve God, who enjoins every virtue, and the world that favours every vice. This is evident of itſelf, and ſtands not in need of proof.

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* Matt. vi. 24.

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It is but too obvious that the wills and ſentiments of theſe two maſters, being in a total and continual oppoſition, they will always command things that are contrary, and conſequently if we reſpect and love the one, we ſhall deſpiſe and hate the other. It is therefore abſolutely neceſſary to chooſe either God or the world, ſince we cannot conciliate them together, nor be at the ſame time in regard to the one and the other, in that diſpoſition of reſpect and of love which we owe to our maſters.

God has his ſervants, who are wholly devoted to him: the world alſo has its decided partiſans, and by far more numerous. I do not here examine which of theſe two parties is the moſt wiſe, equitable, and happy. I only obſerve, that both the one and the other are conſiſtent, in adhering only to one maſter, by which they ſubſcribe to the ſaying of our Lord, who declares it impoſſible to ſerve two.

But there is a claſs of ambiguous chriſtians, or of mitigated worldlings, who pretend to divide themſelves between God and the world; who pretend to conſult the intereſts of both, and to ſerve the one without diſobeying the other, to reſpect and to love both, to diſpleaſe neither, and even to gain the good will of both, by ſuch an equivocal conduct. Theſe chriſtians formally contradict Chriſt, and maintain againſt him that we can ſerve two maſters. It will be

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be no hard task to confute them, and to shew that they are bad servants both of God and the world; that they please neither, that they themselves are pleased with neither, and that in one sense they are more foolish and are more to be pitied than the avowed partisans of the world.

Let us draw their picture. They are people who are convinced of the truth of religion; but who in their heart do not love it; who only practise it through the fear of being lost, and who are unwilling to do more than what is barely necessary to escape eternal damnation. They have some principles, as well as some conscience; but they do not chuse to follow up these principles, nor to listen in all things to conscience. For they have other principles suggested to them by corrupt nature, which they reconcile as well as they can with those of the gospel, and on many heads have a conscience that is false; to which that which is true must yield and submit. Should you propose to them an open breach of any of God's commandments, they will not comply: but should it be a point, in which a sin does not evidently appear, although there be a well-grounded doubt, or where the danger of falling be very considerable, they will not draw back. The essential worship, they are resolved not to omit: but that which, without being of so strict an obligation, is nevertheless indispensable for the entertaining

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tertaining of true piety, they are resolved not to embrace. In like manner, with regard to the world, they do not adopt those maxims which too clearly tend to impiety and libertinism; but at the same time they do not reject those, which in a more indirect and confined manner contradict the morality of Christ. They do not indiscriminately allow themselves all kinds of pleasures; there are some places of resort, which they would not frequent. But as to some certain pleasures, which to a delicate mind would appear suspicious, as to some certain assemblies, which though not wholly indecent, are in many shapes unbecoming, they do not think themselves obliged to refrain from mixing with them. They are in a word irresolute and wavering souls that are ruled by human respect, whom fashion attracts on the one side, whom duty withholds on the other, who float between virtue and vice, rejecting the austerity of the one, as well as the licentiousness of the other; fancying that they can obey the law of God without being wholly captivated, and that they can taste of the joys of the world, without being immersed in them; fancying that they can give a few moments in the morning to some practices of devotion, and the remainder of the day to diversion; and thus work out their salvation at as easy a rate, and with as little trouble as possible.

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From this faithful and no ways exaggerated picture, have I not a right to conclude, that these half-christians, half-worldlings, are bad servants of God and of the world, because they are neither attached to the one nor to the other? In fact, that which a master chiefly expects from his servant is love and affection; he would have him to be attached to his service, and go through it with good will. That God exacts of his servants to be in these dispositions, and that he has a right so to do, is what cannot be disputed, and this is exactly what the half-christian refuses to give him; he serves him; not with a good will, but through necessity, because his chief interest is concerned; and if he could leave off serving him without running any risk, he would cease doing it. Does not this disposition shew itself clearly throughout his whole conduct? and if he were truly and affectionately attached to God, would he not blush at giving him such a rival as the world both in his heart and mind?

On the other hand, the world does not exact less than God the whole affection of its servants, although it has no claim to it. As soon as we in any shape belong to it, and are willing to serve it, it expects that we should belong to it totally, that we should obey it in every thing, and acknowledge no other master: and this is what the half-worldling cannot be prevailed upon

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upon to grant: by which he proves that he does not really love either God or the world, but that he loves himself; that in serving God he only thinks of being secure in future, and in serving the world, of enjoying the present; that he wants to lose nothing, and gain both ways. He injures God by thinking that he cannot be happy in his service here below, he does the world justice by believing that it can give him nothing hereafter; and it is to find every where his interest, that he determines to serve both. This, however, is impracticable, and with all his measures and precautions, he succeeds not in satisfying either.

And how should he satisfy two enemies, who mutually contend for his heart, and which each one wants wholly to possess, whilst he is bent upon dividing it between them? How should he satisfy them, since each of them demands more than he gives, and than he is determined to give? God will have us belong wholly to him, and to him alone; he does not suffer us to embrace his service in part only, or to neglect the least tittle of his will, to do the will of any other master: the title of master only belongs to him, and no other can assume it but through usurpation. He will have us at every moment and on every occasion under his command and dependant upon him. If in any case whatsoever you obey any one else, he justly complains,

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complains, he expreſſes his diſcontent, he even ſhews indignation; and things may go ſo far as for him to renounce you, and no longer acknowledge you for his ſervant.

The world, like a tyrant and an uſurper has the ſame pretenſions which God has in quality of lawful and only ſovereign. It is irritated at the preference we give over it to God; it wants alſo to rule alone, and would have us abandon its enemy, to be wholly devoted to it. With what eye therefore do they ſee both the one and the other; how do they accept a mutilated ſervice, which we render them but with reluctance, and as it were by force? Can they remain ſilent, muſt they not ſhew their reſentment? God by ſecret remorſes, fears, and anxieties with which he agitates and diſtracts the ſoul; the world, by keen railleries, pungent cenſures, and more or leſs ſevere perſecutions. From hence it happens that as they are ill ſatisfied with ſervants of this ſtamp, theſe alſo in their turn are not ſatisfied either with God or the world.

They are not ſatisfied with God, who ever ſhews them a ſevere countenance, who loads them with reproaches, with whom they never have any peace of mind, and who every way makes them feel that he is diſſatisfied with their ſervice. And therefore when they appear before him, it is always with reluctance, well knowing

knowing that they cannot expect a favourable reception, or any consolation. Can it therefore be wondered at that they find his service to be hard; that they should complain that his yoke is insupportable, though they try all they can to lighten it? are they not tempted at every moment to shake it off? and if they yield not to the temptation, is it not through the fear of hell? Such christians are very far from beholding in God a father; and if they view him in any other light, what comfort can they enjoy in the constrained obedience which they render him?

Neither have they more reason to be pleased with the world, because what they do in its service is done ungracefully, and with reserve. They sometimes find themselves ridiculed for retaining their practices of piety; they are laughed at on alledging conscience, and mocked as being scrupulous. Sometimes they are set down as hypocrites, who play with devotion to acquire a certain air, to gain some private end, and to obtain a certain consideration among those who are truly virtuous. Sometimes the world attacks their irresolution, and presses them to take a decisive part between God and itself. It nearly speaks to them as Elias did to the Israelites; *How long do you halt between two sides?* Walk straight in the road of christian penitence, or in that of the pleasures I offer you.

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If the Lord be your God, ſerve him alone; if I am your divinity, only ſacrifice to me. In general the world looks on them with an evil eye; it is diffident of them, and deſpiſes them; it often is the firſt to quit them, and thus forces them to quit it.

In one ſenſe it is therefore true, that all ſuch doubtful chriſtians are more fooliſh than the avowed worldlings, and that they reaſon leſs juſtly. For theſe act conſiſtently with their principles, and are ſteady in conduct; whereas thoſe are in a perpetual contradiction with themſelves, and are ever unſtable. For the ſame reaſon, they are in ſome reſpect more to be pitied, as they do not taſte the true happineſs of virtue, nor the falſe happineſs of vice; and only feel the thorns of the one, and the remorſes of the other.

The world, after all, has its joys: they are vain, it is true, and deceitful; but ſuch as they are, they ſeduce, intoxicate, and procure a kind of enjoyment. The worldling ſavours them, and loſes no part of them; but the chriſtian I here ſpeak of hardly dares touch them with his lips, and the little ſweetneſs he taſtes of them ſoon turns into bitterneſs. Add to this, that the worldling blinds himſelf to the terrors of a future life, which would diſturb his pretended felicity: whilſt this chriſtian is always obſerved by them; and they torment him the more ſeverely, when

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when he could wish to think of them the least. In short, if the salvation of the worldling, whilst he remains in that state, seems to be more desperate; on the other side, it is more susceptible of conversion, and of a solid conversion: because in his cool moments he feels better the danger of his situation; and because from the violence of his character, should he give himself to God, he does it in good earnest. But as to the salvation of this christian, I consider it to be so much the more hazarded, as it is most difficult for him to be converted, on account of his very disposition, and because in his conduct he sees no striking disorder. Let him therefore tremble, and let him take to himself these words of Jesus Christ: *I would thou wert cold or hot, but because thou art luke-warm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my very mouth* *; and I infallibly shall vomit thee, if thou dost not quit that state of tepidity.

O my Saviour, how much have I hitherto illuded myself concerning thy service! I thought that I could reconcile it to the service of the world; and yet they are evidently two incompatible services. I have been for walking in two opposite roads, of which the one leads to life, and the other to death. What blindness! what folly! And therefore I have been at once both culpable and wretched: I have enjoyed

* Apo. iii. 16.

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joyed no kind of happineſs; thy ſervice, and that of the world have been equally burdenſome to me, and I have diſpleaſed you both. From this moment, I entirely divorce myſelf from it, and renounce it as maſter; I never will ſerve any other than thee; this is what I ſolemnly promiſe; grant me grace to be faithful. *Amen.*

TWENTIETH

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TWENTIETH LESSON.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS INTERIOR.

AT the very name of an interior life, moſt people are ſtartled, not only in the chriſtian world, but even in the aſylums of piety, and in cloiſters. Nevertheleſs this life which reſults on the one hand from the operation of grace on the ſoul, and on the other from the faithful correſpondence of the ſoul to grace, is evidently the marrow and eſſence of chriſtianity. I know not that there is any one point in the morality of Jeſus Chriſt, which in order to be underſtood, reliſhed, and practiſed, that does not require that we ſhould be interior, that is, that we ſhould make ourſelves over to the ſpirit of God, and allow him to guide us, by renouncing our own. When will chriſtians, but eſpecially thoſe who are charged with the inſtruction and the direction of others, ſhake off ſo falſe and dangerous a prevention?

Let them liſten to Jeſus Chriſt, who ſays to all, *The kingdom of God is within you* *. Do not ſeek

* Luke, xvii. 21.

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ſeek for it here, nor there, you will find it within yourſelves, if you allow yourſelves ſerious reflections. I ſay, you will find God either in your heart, if you be in the ſtate of grace, or at the door of your heart, if you be in the ſtate of ſin, demanding admittance, that he may take poſſeſſion and reign in it. Let us therefore ponder this ſaying of our Lord; it is ſhort and ſimple; but in its ſhortneſs and ſimplicity, it comprehends all that can be ſaid or written on real and ſolid devotion. What is the kingdom or the reign of God? In what part of us ſhould it be eſtabliſhed? What are the means to eſtabliſh and maintain it in ourſelves? what advantages accrue to us from it, even in this life? What is the ſtate of a ſoul in whom God does not reign? Theſe are ſo many queſtions, which I mean briefly to explain; but the unfolding of them would require a long treatiſe.

The reign of God that is here in queſtion, is not that ſovereign empire which he exerciſes over all creatures by his abſolute will, and from under which none of them can withdraw itſelf. It is not that general providence that governs all, that diſpoſes of all the events, and that brings them to their reſpective ends, without the poſſibility of its deſigns being fruſtrated. It is an empire that only takes place in regard to rational creatures,

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tures, and the exercise of it depends upon them: it is a free and voluntary empire on their part, for which God requirs their consent, and which they are always at liberty to submit to, or oppose: it as a supernatural empire, where God acts solely by his grace, that never does violence to man. This empire from its nature and its object, extends itself to all our free acts, both exterior and interior, so as that all of them be animated and directed by grace; it being God's intention to sanctify them all, and to render them conducive to promote his own glory, as well as our felicity: for such are the two ends for which he would reign in us: he means equally to glorify himself, and to make us happy. We may frustrate him, as to the second end; but as to the first, he always will attain it; because he will draw his glory either from our happiness, or from our eternal misery, according as we shall have merited the one or the other. If therefore it be important that God should reign over us, it is for our own interest, and not for his.

In what part of ourselves should this reign of God be established? what is the seat of it? and what is the faculty to which God immediately intimates his laws, especially the first, the great law of his love, which includes all the others? should it be asked? It is the will, which St. Francis

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Francis of Sales terms the master-piece of the soul; it is the heart, the principle of all its affections; it is liberty, which presides over all its determinations. It is there, in the heart, and over the heart that God is desirous to reign. If he has the heart, he has all the rest, the memory, the understanding, the faculties of the mind and of body; if he has not the heart, he has nothing. Wherefore the heart is the seat of solid piety, of true devotion, that is, of that entire and unbounded dedication which we owe to God.

To reign over the hearts is that which distinguishes the empire of God from every other empire. The kings of the earth exercise their domination over our fortunes, over our bodies, and even over our lives; but they have no right over our hearts; their dominion does not extend so far. And how should it? for they cannot directly act upon the heart; they have no means of knowing what passes there, nor any other rule to judge of our inward sentiments than external marks, which are often deceitful. But God, who alone sounds the hearts, is also the only one who can, and who claims a right to establish in them his reign. In the religious worship which he exacts of us, there should be ceremonies, vocal prayers, and other external practises; because the body in its way, ought

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ought to honour God; because sensible impressions have great power over the soul in what belongs to religion, as well as in every thing else; and because, living in society, we owe to each other mutual edification, an open profession of our sentiments on this fundamental object. But the essence of worship consists in the disposition of the heart, in its submission, its respect, and its love: so that the body, by its humble posture representing the annihilated state of the heart in the presence of God; the mouth, by its words expressing the sentiments of it; and all the external acts of religion are merely hypocrisy, unless they be dictated and animated by the heart.

This is what we know; and we know also that grace alone can inspire our hearts with religious sentiments. But on all these truths, we confine ourselves nearly to speculation; and notwithstanding the conviction we are in of the necessity of having God to reign in our heart, there are very few christians in whom he truly reigns. We say that we love him, but it is on our own account; it is in the view of our spiritual, and sometimes our temporal interest, which we prefer to his glory. We serve him, not for his sake, but for our own; we pray to him, to ask of him, but not to offer to him. We offer to him, but merely in words; and on the

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the occaſion we are not afraid to refuſe that which we had offered. We give him things exterior, but the inward affections of the heart, we are unwilling to ſacrifice. We are willing enough that he ſhould govern us by his grace in things that are eſſential, where our ſalvation is at ſtake; but not in thoſe that are of perfection, and where we do not ſee any conſiderable ſin. Hence God has only the ſecond place in our heart; we occupy the firſt ourſelves, and in the love which we think we have for him, it is in fact ourſelves whom we love. Let us therefore once for all reſolve to render God the abſolute maſter of our heart; and to admit of nothing, I do not ſay that is oppoſite to his reign, but that weakens, contracts, or circumſcribes it.

Now what are the means to eſtabliſh and to preſerve in us God's reign? This point is of practice. The firſt means to eſtabliſh it, is to will it. There is no doubt that God on his part wills and ardently deſires it; if we deſire and will it in like manner, the thing cannot fail taking place, for it only depends upon theſe two wills, and as ſoon as they concur, the effect is infallible. That which God is to contribute on his part is always ready, and is given or offered to us, ſuch as lights, inſpirations, general and particular graces, interior and exterior ſuccours. That which he expects on our part, is a ſtrong

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a ſtrong determination to be wholly his, to obey him in all things, and to refuſe him nothing.

We flatter ourſelves too eaſily that we have this good will, which is more rare than is imagined. We take for it thoſe pious deſires which grace excites in us from time to time, and which we do not effectuate; thoſe motions of ſenſible devotion which ſeize us by intervals, and which end in nothing that is ſolid; thoſe projects and reſolutions which we form, but which we do not execute; thoſe promiſes which we make, and which we do not keep. After a thouſand good purpoſes, we are always the ſame, and we are unjuſt enough to lay the blame upon God, whilſt all the fault takes its riſe from our own negligence and inconſtancy.

The ſecond mean is to make it the principal object of our prayers, and frequently to repeat that petition of the Lord's Prayer, thy kingdom come. There is no day paſſes, in which we do not often repeat it. But do we reflect on the meaning of it? Is it the heart that pronounces it? and do we ſincerely wiſh to be heard? Could we be otherwiſe than heard in a prayer which the Son of God himſelf has dictated to us, if we ſaid it with due diſpoſitions? Let therefore the reign of God in us be our moſt frequent

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frequent aſpiration in the day; let it be the ſcope of our exerciſes of piety and of our good works; let us never loſe ſight of this end; let us refer to it every thing elſe; and we ſhall ſoon experience that God has taken poſſeſſion of our heart. I muſt obſerve hear by the bye, that in our prayers we too often change our intention; let us have one principal intention, which we never ſhould quit, and to which all the others ſhould tend. When the ſoul is ſtrongly and deeply penetrated with an object, and when by every means it purſues it, it is almoſt a ſure ſign of attaining it, becauſe in fact it is thus that grace prompts us to aſk, without ever deſiſting until our wiſh be accompliſhed.

The third mean is to remark that which puts an obſtacle to the reign of God within us, and to rid our heart of it by degrees. But this is the difficult point, and which pains us the moſt to carry into execution. It often happens that this holds but by one thing; and if we had the courage to ſacrifice, for example, ſuch an attachment, to correct ſuch a fault, to embrace the practice of prayer, to be more faithful in ſilence and recollection, all impediment would be removed. For there is always one capital one, which diſappearing, would ſoon cauſe all the others to diſappear.

Finally,

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Finally, as we are blind to what from our own fund we oppoſe to the reign of God, the fourth mean is inceſſantly to pray that he would enlighten us on that inward diſpoſition of rebellion againſt him, which we bring with us into the world, and to which age, habit and propenſity to the following of our will has given ſtrength. Whoſoever is deſirous of having lights upon that head, is ſure of obtaining them. We need only follow them as they come, and retrench, without pity, what retards or weakens in us the reign of God. But in what we are the moſt culpable, is it not to dread thoſe lights, to ſhut our eyes upon them when they preſent themſelves, to reſiſt and repel them, to complain of their importunity, and to wiſh that God would leave us to a certain degree in a blindneſs which we cheriſh?

The ſame means which eſtabliſh in us the reign of God, ſerve to maintain it. In general the only thing to be done is to abandon ourſelves entirely to grace, and to be determined to follow the ſpirit of God whitherſoever it ſhall lead us. For to wiſh that God ſhould reign in us, and at the ſame time to pretend ſtill to diſpoſe of ourſelves in any thing whatſoever, are two incompatible things. He will be maſter of all; and if he be not, he will ſoon quit a heart that dares diſpute any thing with him. How many ſouls have had ſad experi-

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ment of this! For there are many in whom he has made, as it were, eſſays of his reign, and who have forced him to renounce it. Let us dread being of the number; and if we have once ranged ourſelves under his laws, let us not be ſo inſane as to contend or wiſh to compound with him. His infinite jealouſy admits no reſtriction nor diviſion: too happy that he ſhould vouchſafe to govern us, and conduct us through the path of holineſs to our eternal deſtination.

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CONTINUATION OF THE SAME LESSON.

I SHALL not undertake to run through all the advantages that accrue to a feeling ſoul where God reigns. It is readily granted, that whilſt under his guidance, it advances by long ſtrides towards holineſs, but by an inconceivable contradiction, we are unwilling to admit that it goes on with equal rapidity towards happineſs, even in this life. Nothing, however, is more certain, and it is from want of reflection that we are not convinced of it. This truth is what I inculcate the moſt in this work, and I ſhall inſiſt upon, as often as the occaſion ſhall offer. I ſay then, that the preſent and actual felicity of man is a neceſſary conſequence of his perfection; and that the degree of the one always anſwers in the moſt juſt meaſure to the degree of the other. What is the object of perfection? for me to approach unto God; for me to render myſelf as like unto him as my nature will admit. But God is infinitely happy but becauſe he is infinitely holy, and infinitely perfect; I therefore ſhall partake of his happineſs in proportion as I ſhall partake of his holineſs.

Let us, pauſe a while on this point, and ponder it leiſurely. It deſerves the moſt ſerious

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attention, and decides every thing for our conduct in life. We wish to be happy; we wish to be so at present; our impatience on this head brooks no retardation. I am very far from blaming this desire, which God has implanted in our hearts. But let us take the only road that leads to happiness. We have sought for it by other roads, and have not met with it. Why should we persist in an illusion from which, by daily experience we are disabused? Let us allow God to reign within us, he thereby will sanctify us; of this we have no doubt; and in sanctifying us, he will give us to taste the only true happiness that there is upon earth.

In fact, what is a christian over whom God reigns? It is one who wills all that God wills, who freely submits to all the dispositions of his providence, and who is well pleased at the accomplishment of his will. He therefore meets with no contrarieties, and no situation, whatever alters his peace of mind; because he places his peace in the divine will which he does not resist, and therefore is always done. It is one who successively weans himself from all earthly things; who makes himself independent of the world and its judgments; whose notions are very different from those of the world on what it terms prosperity and adversity, blessings and evils of this life; and who views all things according

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cording to the ideas of God, which alone are true and immutable; it is consequently one who is elevated above all human events, who aspires after nothing, who fears nothing, and who is placed in a region that is inaccessible to the agitations of the sea of the world. Not that he does not as others do, experience misfortunes, hardships, and overthrows; not that he does not suffer in his fortune, in his body, or reputation; but nothing of that kind disturbs his tranquillity: or if he have any trouble, it is quite superficial and momentary, and never reaches the closet of his heart, where his God resides. It is one who continually exercises himself in dying to himself, that he may live in God; who becomes by degrees almost insensible to what violently affects other men; who has no longer nor love nor hatred, nor fear nor desire that are natural; who consequently is exempt from all those anguishes which are occasioned by the passions of pride and self-love, our real and only tormentors. It is one whose simple, upright, just, enlightened, and disinterested piety knows not either the scruples or the anxieties of weak imaginations; or the caprices and the fantasticness a mistaken devotion; or the tiresome reflections, the vain complaisancies, or the delicate cravings of interested spiritualists, or the terrors of death and of its consequences, at which those who are mercenary are affrighted; it is

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one who is ſtrong in temptations, courageous in trials, detached from conſolations, and unſhaken amidſt the viciſſitudes of an interior life. If at firſt he be not exactly ſuch, by his faithfulneſs he will become ſo in time; and it is impoſſible that he ſhould not become ſo under the direction of God who reigns within him.

How can ſuch a chriſtian be otherwiſe than happy? He has no wiſh but for God, his ſovereign good; and he poſſeſſes him, as he is poſſeſſed by him; he has no other deſire than to love him ſtill more, and his love daily increaſes; he only fears to offend him; and from one day to another his faults grow ſlighter and fewer; he aſpires only to eternal enjoyment of him whom he loves, and carries within his breaſt almoſt a ſure teſtimony that his hope will be ſatisfied.

As to thoſe with whom he lives, he has charity for all. His commerce with the virtuous, who bear a reſemblance with himſelf, is wholly delicious; he compaſſionates the wicked, and patiently bears whatever it pleaſes God that he ſhould ſuffer from them, without either rancour or reſentment, without ceaſing to wiſh them well, and to do them what good he can; he ſupports, he excuſes the faults and imperfections of others, fulfilling all the duties of ſociety, which are the matter and exerciſe of his virtues.

This

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This is not a fancy-picture: it only can appear such to those who have no knowledge of the kingdom of God within us, and of the admirable effects it produces. I have even but barely chalked it out. But experience will teach more of it to those who are willing to learn, and who startle not at first at few difficulties, which are not so great as it generally is imagined.

Let us say a word on the state of a christian in whom God does not reign. To paint him at one single stroke, he is neither well with God, nor with himself, nor with others; and consequently he is every way destitute of happiness. I do not speak of sinners: the Scripture has pronounced that they can have no peace; I speak of tepid and imperfect christians, who float between nature and grace, who are not willing to refuse all to the first, nor to grant all to the second. This disposition alone of trimming it between two enemies, that constantly are at war, the seat of which is their heart, which cannot but be an endless source of doubts, fears, and anguishes of a conscience that never is pure nor decided. They are wretched, if they enter into their interior; they are still more so, if they shun self-inspection.

Neither are they well with God. It is not possible that he should deal with them as friends,

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friends, as long as they are obſtinate in refuſing him any thing. If they abſolutely do not ſay: *We will not have this man to reign over us* *: they ſay at leaſt, we will not have him to reign over us as he chuſes, but as we chuſe. Needs there be any thing elſe to become diſpleaſing in his ſight? He has in our regard the tenderneſs of a father, but in as much as he exerciſes over us all the authority of a king; and he ceaſes to look upon us as his favourite children, when he does not find us to be ſubjects that are fully dutiful. It is therefore according to order that they ſhould be deprived of all familiarity with him, of which they render themſelves unworthy. They in conſequence complain that he neglects them, they are jealous of the favours which he grants to others, and tax him with being partial. Always dry, cold, and languiſhing, they go but with reluctance to all exerciſes of piety, where they are diſtracted and inſenſible, finding no reliſh, and drawing no comfort from them; all duties are burthenſome to them, and they painfully diſcharge them.

They are not well with themſelves. Every reflection on their inward ſtate diſturbs and makes them ſad. They know not whether their diſpoſition be ſure or dubious; and as they extremely dread their being loſt, ſeeing nothing

* Luke xix. 14.

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nothing that gives them confidence, they become a prey to endleſs anxieties, and ſometimes to impreſſions of deſpair: ſo much the more ſo, that being leſs moved at the comfortable, than the terrible truths of religion, they think on them but with horror, and only ſee in God a judge and an avenger. Their imagination and ſelf-love unite in tormenting them; and the predominant ſentiment of fear contracts and afflicts them, and allows them no reſt.

Their extreme ſenſibility and pretenſions, their delicacy and ſuſpicions are the cauſe that they are not better off with others, and that they meet but with few characters with which they are at their eaſe. They are not well pleaſed with thoſe who are holy, the ſight of whom alone is a reproach to them. They have not ſufficient virtue to bear with what they have to ſuffer from the conduct of the wicked, whoſe injuſtice, inſincerity, and malevolence become a torment to them. Thoſe who reſemble them, who are neither good nor bad, require to be borne with; and the habitual bearing with our neighbour ſuppoſes more charity than they have. Nevertheleſs they ſeek after things created, being unable to do without them, and having no reſource in themſelves, they are ſoon ſickened and diſguſted at their inſuffi-

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ciency. New connexions ſucceed the former, which procure them no other pleaſure than that of a change; a pleaſure that paſſes very faſt, and which often leaves them room to regret the ſociety they at firſt had frequented. Thus do they run from one eſſay to another, and are always more diſſatisfied with the laſt. How does this happen? becauſe their heart is void; becauſe God does not fill it; becauſe he reigns not in it, and becauſe where God is not there is no happineſs to be hoped for, for man. On the ſmalleſt ſelf-inſpection, each one will find within him the proof of what I advance.

O my Saviour, what a wonderful ſaying haſt thou uttered, by teaching me that the reign of God is within me! If the world teem with unhappy ſouls of every deſcription, if it be a rare thing to meet with any one who is content with his lot, it is becauſe we do not reflect on that ſaying, and do not chuſe to ſee that whereſoever thou reigneſt, thou bringeſt along with thee both holineſs and felicity. Come therefore and eſtabliſh thy reign in my heart, which I have too long diſputed with thee; to my confuſion, I acknowledge it. From henceforward take poſſeſſion of it, and govern it by thy grace which is both ſweet and imperious. O thou King of Hearts, for ſuch is thy title, is it poſſible that it ever ſhould be a vain title to me? permit

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permit it not, I conjure thee, but rather deſtroy whatever is in me that oppoſes the exerciſe of thy ſovereign dominion. Diſpoſe of my will, of my liberty, of my moſt intimate affections: I wiſh only for one thing, that thy bleſſed will be accompliſhed in me and by me during time, in order that it may be accompliſhed in thy heavenly kingdom, that never will have an end. *Amen.*

ONE

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ONE AND TWENTIETH LESSON.

TO SEEK BEFORE EVERY THING ELSE THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

JESUS CHRIST, after having recommended to us not to be anxious, as heathens are, about eating, drinking, and clothing: becauſe our heavenly Father knows that we have need of all theſe things, and becauſe, through his bounty, he will provide us with them all, concludes as follows: *Seek ye therefore firſt the kingdom of God, and his juſtice, and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you* *. You ſhall have the ſpiritual and the eternal; and the temporal ſhall not be refuſed you by him who has the diſpoſal of both the one and the other.

This is a leſſon that regards us all, and we ſtand in the greateſt need of it. It is God's intention, that man ſhould live by his labour and induſtry; he is even condemned ſo to do ever ſince his fall. Excluſive of a ſmall number of rich, who live by their revenues, and who even ſo are obliged to take pains to ſecure the poſſeſſion of them; the reſt of mankind eat their bread at the ſweat of their brow, and are daily employed

* Matth. vi. 33.

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employed about the means of ſupporting themſelves and their family. From hence it follows, that all kinds of labour, of attention, and forecaſt, in order to procure ourſelves the neceſſaries of life, are in the order of providence, which order ought to be ſo ſtrictly obſerved, that St. Paul pronounces that he who will not work has no right to his food *.

But what a number of abuſes generally attend the neceſſity we are under of providing for the wants of life! to how many crimes does it give birth! to what a pitch does it irritate the paſſions! ſome never have enough; others are always in fear, leſt they ſhould want; both the one and the other are in the moſt violent agitation; they go, they come, they riſe and lie down with this thought; and without diſcerning between the means that are lawful and thoſe that are not, they uſe all endeavours to gratify their avarice, or to preſerve themſelves from miſery. But the greateſt evil, and that which is the ſource of every other is, that this exceſſive attention to the temporal, makes them forget the eternal; it makes them neglect the ſoul for the body, and ſacrifice to the intereſts of the preſent life the by far more important intereſts of the life to come.

Jeſus Chriſt applies a remedy to thoſe diſorders, by teaching firſt to ſeek before every thing elſe

* 2 Theſſ. iii. 10.

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elſe the kingdom of God, and his juſtice; ſecondly not to be ſolicitous, relative to our temporal concerns; thirdly, to rely on the bounty of our heavenly Father, who as he provides for all nature, never can forget us men, who are his children.

In fact, the thing that every chriſtian ought to do, if he be wiſe and underſtand his real intereſt, is to be well convinced that God has not placed him, nor could have placed him upon the earth, merely to live, but to ſanctify himſelf; that this life is but a journey, more or leſs long, the term of which is the next life, which never will have an end; that being made up of a body and of a ſoul, that which concerns the ſubſiſtance and the well-being of the body, is nothing in compariſon with that which regards the preſent and the future ſtate of the ſoul. He is no chriſtian, if he be not convinced of thoſe truths; and he is inſane, beyond all expreſſion, if, being convinced of them, he do not make them the baſis and the rule of his conduct. If then he conſults his reaſon and his faith, they will tell him that he ought to put a certain order in the object of his thoughts, of his deſires, and of his actions; that he ought to place each object in its rank, by giving the preference to thoſe who deſerve it, and that he ought never to deviate from this plan, which is dictated

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dictated to him by the very nature of things, and by the will of God.

Now, here is the inviolable order which God marks out for him, and to which his dearest interests make it a duty to him to conform. My soul, should he say, is the best part of myself; the body which it inhabits, is made for it. The wants therefore of the soul ought to go before the wants of the body; and I should be hurtful to myself, did I provide for these to the prejudice of those. The sole want of my soul, the only thing it desires, is to be happy; the natural light, and that of revelation, teach me in concert that it is destined to enjoy in another life an eternal happiness, and that this happiness is its end. I therefore ought to aspire to this happiness, and refer every thing to it; I ought to tend to that end, and never swerve from it. But I have only one mean of attaining it, which is punctually to observe God's commandments; to follow from point to point the morality which Jesus Christ has taught me; in a word, to believe and to practise in the bosom of the Catholic Church the dogmas and the precepts of the religion which this God-Man has revealed to me. If this be the only road, and if it be sure, what else have I to do, but to enter upon it, to follow it, and constantly to walk in it until death. This is what Jesus Christ calls *to seek the kingdom of God and his justice.*

Such

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Such then is the grand object which ought to hold the first place both in my mind and heart, and about which I ought to be occupied before every thing and above every thing else.

But my soul is united with a body, to which it is subject for its operations; and the functions of the one and the other are in a reciprocal dependance; the soul is charged to take care of the body, and to provide what is necessary for its support. It is then according to order also that I should feed, clothe, and preserve it in health and from danger. This is one of my duties, which God himself has enjoined me. All this is true; but it is not less true, that this duty is of its own nature subordinate to the other duty which directly has for object the happiness of my soul; that I am to fulfil the first, but relatively to the second, and only as a condition, without which I should not attain to my end. Should it therefore happen that I could not acquit myself of both these duties at one and the same time, without hesitating I should be under an obligation of sacrificing the well-being of my body, and my body itself to the interest of my soul. It is upon this account that corporal necessity, let it be ever so great, never can authorise me to commit the smallest sin, nor to omit the least act of virtue in any one circumstance in which it might be commanded. Thus every christian is to reason and to act.

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The conſequences that flow from this reaſoning are numberleſs in practice, and it is eaſy to apply them as the occaſions occur. For what do we labour to grow rich? For the body, either our own, or that of our children. But the wants of either do not require riches, the neceſſary, according to our condition, is ſufficient, and this neceſſary in every ſtate of life has its bounds. If I paſs over thoſe bounds, it is no longer the body to which I liſten, but to covetouſneſs; and whatever this paſſion ſuggeſts, is forbidden by the goſpel of Chriſt. Were it even to adviſe nothing that is unjuſt, in itſelf, if it goes beyond what is needful, it goes beyond proper bounds. Why do people embrace various conditions of life? In order to ſubſiſt. But each one of thoſe conditions has duties that intereſt the ſoul. I therefore muſt never fail in the diſcharge of thoſe duties under the pretence of my own ſubſiſtence; and all the frauds that are ſo common in every kind of commerce, profeſſions, and trades, are not juſtified by the excuſe, that I cannot extricate myſelf from my difficulties by any other means. In ſhort, it is clear, that, if we preferred the ſoul and its intereſts to thoſe of the body, if we propoſed to ourſelves the acquiring the kingdom of God before every thing elſe, covetouſneſs, that ſcourge of the human race, would be extinguiſhed in the heart of man.

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I do not ſpeak here of thoſe whom the neceſſity of living has forced, as they ſay, to betake themſelves to infamous profeſſions, or very dangerous (for ſalvation) either of themſelves or from the circumſtances that attend them. They are not thereby excuſable before men; how ſhould they be excuſable in the ſight of God? Many hold this language only to make believe that they have an honeſt ſoul. But even if it were ſo, and that in other reſpects they had ſome principles of religion, either they never would engage in ſuch profeſſions, or immediately would quit them, though they ſhould beg their bread, and abaſe themſelves to the loweſt ranks according to the world. What ſhall I ſay to them? Books of this kind ſeldom fall into their hands; and if perchance they ſhould read them, there are enough of other places that are proper to ſtir their conſcience, and to withdraw them from the abyſs into which they have thrown themſelves.

The capital point, therefore, is that which I have been expounding. But Jeſus Chriſt does not ſtop there. He forbids us all inquietude about the wants of the body; that is to ſay, that in giving to our temporal affairs the neceſſary labour and application, in employing the means, and taking proper meaſures to bring them to bear, we are to baniſh whatſoever holds the ſoul in ſuſpenſe, in agitation, and in trouble,

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and deprives it of the freedom of mind that is requiſite for our ſpiritual concerns, which are of a much greater conſequence. This ſolicitude and agitation are in fact a proof of too great an attachment to the things of the earth, of too ardent a deſire of acquiring them, or of too much fear of loſing them.

Now in thoſe matters paſſion ought never to have any ſhare, both becauſe it contributes in nothing to the ſucceſs of our undertakings, but rather is hurtful to them, and becauſe it robs us of our repoſe, and hinders us from attending with tranquillity to our ſalvation. From whence proceed the many diſtractions with which we are attacked in the time of prayer? Almoſt always from our worldly ſolicitudes. A father, a mother go to church with their heads full of buſineſs; it is impoſſible for them to become recollected, or think of any thing elſe; their heart is cold and dry, and they can ſay nothing to God. Of this they complain, and accuſe themſelves of it; but they do not aſcend to the cauſe, nor do they apply a remedy. They will tell you that it is not on their own account that they are ſolicitous, but on account of their children, for whom they muſt provide. I anſwer that they are not to be more anxious for their children than for themſelves; that when they have taken every ſuitable meaſure to ſettle them to advantage, they

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they ought to remain at reſt. Let them do in that reſpect what God requires of them; but let them not go beyond. Now the will of God is, that they ſhould ſeek before every thing the kingdom of God and his juſtice, both for themſelves and children: and if this ſeeking, important as it is, ought to be done with calmneſs and quietude, how much more ſo ought that ſeeking to be moderate which has for object the procuring them temporal advanvantages, and ſettling them according to their ſtation. Not only ought they to be exempt from corroding cares and turbulent agitations, but it is their duty to ſanctify, through ſupernatural motives, the attentions they pay to their children, and render them ſubſervient to their own ſalvation.

Wherefore Jeſus Chriſt requires, that in what regards the temporal, we ſhould principally rely on God's paternal goodneſs, who clothes in ſo beautiful an array the lillies of the field, and who feeds the birds of the air, who neither ſow nor reap, nor gather in proviſions. How much more will he think of you, ye men of little faith? adds our Lord. Of you who by ſo many titles are his children, and who would hold yourſelves as offended with reaſon, if your children were diffident of the tenderneſs and the care you have for them? What fathers are you, in compariſon with him? He requires,

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requires, that by an entire confidence we ſhould honour his providence, that watches over all, that provides for all, and without the permiſſion of which, not a hair of our heads can fall. He requires, that in our wants we ſhould have recourſe to him, that we ſhould recommend to him the ſucceſs of our temporal affairs, that we ſhould be perſuaded that whatever he appoints is the beſt; that whether rich or poor, we ſhould continue ſubmiſſive and content, always occupied in bleſſing and in thanking him; that we ſhould give an infinite preference to ſpiritual advantages, and that on the occaſion we ſhould know how to ſacrifice to them with joy the things that are temporal; ſaying with holy Job: *The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away: as it hath pleaſed the Lord, ſo it is done: bleſſed be the name of the Lord**. He promiſes, that if our firſt attention carries us towards the ſpiritual, which after all is our real good, the temporal ſhall never be wanting to us, not perhaps in the abundance that nature might crave; but in an honeſt ſufficiency.

By this diſpoſition of confidence and diſintereſtedneſs, you will engage God to come to your aſſiſtance, to give his benediction to the means you employ, to ſuggeſt others that will prove more effectual, and to contrive for you unexpected reſources, in which you will clearly

* Job i. 21.

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clearly see the attentions of a Father. Wherefore in all your temporal concerns, in which you have recourse to God, in the first place you may rest assured, that which way soever they turn out, it will be to the advantage of your soul; secondly, that if it be not prejudicial to your soul, he will cause them to succeed. What more can you wish for? And with such an assurance, how can you do otherwise than repose in peace in the bosom of his providence?

Take notice (for I must not lose sight of this object) that Jesus Christ has in view here, as well as every where else, not only your future, but also your present happiness. Can there be any thing more contrary to it than the inquietudes, the vexations, and torments which the wants of the body bring on? Jesus Christ frees us from them. Is there any thing that can contribute more to your peace of mind, than that order which he would have you put in the objects of your thoughts and affections; than that attention of keeping your heart free from all desire, and all fear with regard to the temporal; than that confidence in your heavenly Father, which he recommends to you; in short, than that precise assurance which he gives you, that, if you seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, the things temporal, of which he knows you stand in need, will be added unto you? O

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blind and thoughtleſs men, would you not be penetrated with reſpect and ſubmiſſion towards the morality of the goſpel, were you to meditate it without prepoſſeſſion?

O my divine Maſter, the more I advance in your leſſons, the more I admire them. How charming, how reaſonable, how ſalutary, and how ſuitable are they to my nature! How holy, how happy ſhould I be, did I reduce them to practice! I have lived till now, as if I only had to think of my body; I have taken endleſs pains to ſecure its well-being. I have degraded myſelf, and have rendered myſelf culpable; I have loſt my reſt: and withal this body which has occupied me ſo much, which I have abundantly ſupplied with all that it craved, has been no ways the better for it; it ſtood not in need of ſo much, fewer things would have done. But this immortal ſoul, for which I ought to have done every thing, and for which I have done nothing, what a pitiful condition is it in? With what virtues have I enriched it? or rather, with how many vices have I not ſtained it? Behold it poor, naked, wretched, and worthy of thy chaſtiſements, becauſe I choſe to be in affluence of temporal advantages. I am aſhamed of it, O my Saviour, and ſincerely repent; I beſeech thee to pardon me the paſt; for the future I reſolve, with the help

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help of thy grace, to ſeek that kingdom for which my ſoul is created, and that juſtice, which alone can lead me to it; and to give only to my body, this lump of clay, the attention which I cannot refuſe it. *Amen.*

TWENTY-

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TWENTY-SECOND LESSON.

SWEETNESS OF THE YOKE OF THE LORD.

ALTHOUGH Jeſus Chriſt has expreſsly declared that *his yoke was ſweet, and his burden light* *, there are very few chriſtians who are intimately perſuaded of it. The major part of them believe this truth, nearly as they do the myſteries; that is, as a thing which they cannot comprehend, and of which they have no experience. Lower down we ſhall ſee why they want that experience. Let us begin by giving them to underſtand that nothing is leſs myſterious nor leſs incomprehenſible than this ſaying of our Saviour, provided we take it in the meaning in which he has ſpoken it. For it is not to corrupt nature to which he addreſſed it, nor to which his yoke ſhould be ſweet, and his burden light. We muſt not therefore liſten to the dictates of nature, an enemy of all yoke and all burthen. But let us conſult our reaſon and our faith; and at their tribunal we ſhall find that there is not a ſentence in the goſpel that is every way more true, than the one before us.

* Matt. xi. 30.

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There is no ſweeter yoke, nor no lighter burden, than the yoke and the burden of love. When once we love, ſays St. Auſtin, there is no more pain; or ſhould there be any, we love that alſo. Now the yoke of Jeſus Chriſt is nothing but an exerciſe of love. It conſiſts in the love of God, in a proper love of ourſelves, and in the love of our neighbour; three kinds of love which are inſeparable, of which the two latter are a ſequel of the former.

I do not aſk whether it be juſt (this cannot be conteſted) but whether it be ſweet to love God, the infinitely amiable being, our ſovereign good, the ſource of all good, who has given us all, from whom we expect all, and by whom alone we poſſibly can be happy? Reaſon, enlightened by faith, is found to anſwer that nothing can be more ſweet than a love like this; and that if there be any thing painful in the ſervice which God exacts of us, and in the precepts he enjoins, his love, which is the firſt of his precepts, is ſufficient to ſweeten it. If our heart make not the ſame avowal, it is becauſe it has not began to love. What need was there, ſays St. Auſtin, that thou ſhouldeſt command us to love thee, and that thou ſhouldeſt threaten us with great evils, if we loved thee not? as if the not loving of thee were not the greateſt of evils?

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I aſk if it be ſweet to love one's ſelf with a proper and well-regulated love; to wiſh one's real, ſolid, and eternal happineſs; to tend towards it by the means which God has marked out for us, and which alone can ſecure it, and to avoid whatever can expoſe us to the loſs of it? It doubtleſs will be anſwered, that no love can be ſweet, if this be not ſo.

I again aſk, if it be not ſweet to love one another with a cordial and fraternal love; reciprocally to teſtify our good will by kindneſs and benefits; to relieve each other in our wants, in our evils, and troubles; to bear with, to excuſe, and to pardon one another; to live in peace and union with thoſe who are linked to us by natural and ſocial relations; we, I ſay, who are children of the ſame Father, who form but one great family, who are brethren in Jeſus Chriſt, who have the ſame eſſential duties to fulfil, who aſpire to the ſame happineſs, and who hope to be one day re-united for ever in the ſame country. To deny that ſuch a love is ſweet, would be ſenſeleſs; ſince it is evident that even the felicity of this life is annexed to it. But if ſuch a love be ſweet, it is perſonally ſo to one who feels the ſentiments of it, and follows it in practice, in what manner ſoever his neighbour behaves towards him.

The morality of Jeſus Chriſt, which is reduced to theſe three kinds of love, is therefore

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ſweet; and if it be a burden, we muſt acknowledge it to be light. Yet there is ſomething within us that contradicts this truth, and that finds no ſweetneſs, nor in the love of God, nor in the proper love of ourſelf, nor in the love of our neighbour. A pride, as inſane as it is impious, excites us to rebel againſt the ſweeteſt of empires, cauſes us to reject what ſubjects our will to rule, how juſt ſoever it may be, and neceſſary for our happineſs. A ſelf-love that is contrary to reaſon and good order concentres us in ourſelves, excludes from our hearts all affection that bears no reference to ourſelves, and renders odious to us that perfect charity which loves God for himſelf, and our neighbour for God. How can the yoke of Chriſt poſſibly be ſweet to pride and ſelf-love, ſince it is againſt them and to deſtroy them that it is impoſed upon us? But that which is hard to our vicious diſpoſitions, is not on that account leſs ſweet in itſelf, and in regard to the fund and the eſſence of our nature, which it tends to diſengage from thoſe vices.

It is doubtleſs ſweet to be freed from the tyranny of our paſſions. In this all philoſophers agree, not excepting Epicurus; and thoſe who are tormented by their paſſions are the firſt to own it, in the intervals of good ſenſe and reflection which they occaſionally allow them. If ſo, the yoke of the Lord is of courſe

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courſe full of ſweetneſs, becauſe it tends to liberate us from our paſſions by far more effectually than all that human wiſdom ever could bring to bear. That we muſt fight to overcome them, that there are efforts to be made, and that every effort of its own nature is painful, is what I do not deny: and in what ſchool of philoſophy has man been exempted from combats and efforts? as if, independently of them, he ever could be corrected. But the chriſtian receives from grace the moſt powerful ſuccours, which diminiſh the violence of the combat, and inſures ſucceſs. If it coſts to ſubdue his paſſions, he feels an inexpreſſible joy at having overcome them; which pleaſure is renewed at every victory he obtains.

It is ſweet to command our body, to rule our own mind and will, to be maſter of all our faculties, and to diſpoſe of our free will in a manner that is pleaſing to God, that reaſon avows, and that ſatisfies conſcience. The yoke of Jeſus Chriſt has no other object than to procure us theſe advantages, which we ſhall infallibly attain, if we carry it faithfully.

It is ſweet not to have to groan under the ſlavery of ſin, nor to experience the remorſes that follow it; it is ſweet to be exempt from the terrors of the life to come, which ſo violently alarm a guilty conſcience; to enjoy the peacefulneſs and ſecurity of innocence; to ren-

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der to ourſelves the comfortable teſtimony that it is not in vain that we endeavour to pleaſe God, and to indulge the hope of poſſeſſing him eternally, which is always the fruit of a pure and holy life. Are not all theſe bleſſings the portion of all thoſe who carry the yoke of Chriſt, and never allow themſelves to depart from the obſervance of his law? I ſhould be endleſs, were I to conſider this yoke under all its aſpects, and were I to enumerate all the ſweets that accompany it.

But, it will be ſaid, is it not a hard taſk to deny one's ſelf, to hate one's ſelf, to crucify one's fleſh with all its concupiſcences, to oppoſe the inclinations that are born with us, and to be ever raiſing ourſelves above nature, in order to follow grace? Is not the way of virtue both ſteep and painful? is not the gate narrow and ſtrait, the path that leads to life? That continual war we muſt make on ourſelves, that ſeduction of the world againſt which we muſt guard; thoſe cenſures, thoſe railleries, and perſecutions to which we muſt be expoſed; thoſe temptations, thoſe ſnares, and aſſaults of the devil, from which we muſt ſcreen ourſelves, muſt ſurely be a rugged and painful exerciſe to a chriſtian, and cannot fail embittering his life.

It is eaſy to anſwer, in the firſt place, that if it be a hard taſk to offer to ourſelves all thoſe violences,

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violences, it is ſtill more painful to offer to ourſelves none at all, and to live at the caprice of our corrupted deſires. Secondly, that Jeſus Chriſt did not mean to ſay that it was to coſt no pains to ſubmit to his morality, ſince he ſtyles it a yoke and a burden: a yoke, ſuppoſes ſome conſtraint; and a burden, is always felt. But do we make no account of the power of grace, whoſe property it is to engage to love what nature abhors, and to communicate to us a ſtrength ſufficient to alleviate the heavieſt of burdens? Do we make no account of thoſe heavenly conſolations which God ſhowers down upon his faithful ſervants, and which in a moment amply indemnify them for all their paſt afflictions? They ſee our croſſes, ſaid St. Bernard, ſpeaking to his religious, of worldlings, but they ſee not the unction of them: if they did, their language and ideas would be different; they would confeſs that our life, which to them ſeems dreadful, is in every reſpect much ſweeter than theirs.

This is a teſtimony which all the ſaints, that is, all perfect chriſtians, without any exceptions, have given to the words of Jeſus Chriſt; the confeſſors of his name in priſons, in exiles, in works of mines, in poverty, in perſecutions; the martyrs before judges, upon ſcaffolds, in the moſt horrible torments. God proportions his ſuccour to what we do and to what we ſuffer for

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for him; and this ſuccour ſo fortifies the ſoul, that it wiſhes to do and to ſuffer ſtill more.

What then is the cauſe why ſo many chriſtians complain of the ſeverity of this yoke, and the heavineſs of this burden? Becauſe they are only chriſtians by name, and by outward profeſſion; becauſe they have not the true chriſtian ſpirit, and even are ignorant of it; becauſe they do not ſeriouſly undertake the practice of the goſpel-morality, and are unwilling to ſuffer themſelves to be wholly guided by grace.

The major part take up the yoke of the Lord, much more from fear, than from love. The dreadful truths of religion have made ſome impreſſion on their mind; they do not chuſe to be loſt, and they keep the commandments merely to ſhun burning in hell; for it is not the pain of loſs that affects them, although it be the greateſt, but the pain of ſenſe. Now whoever ſubmits himſelf to the yoke of Jeſus Chriſt but through the motive of fear, ſubmits himſelf leſs by will than by neceſſity; he does not love it; he would ſhake it off, if his intereſt would allow him. What ſweetneſs of courſe can he poſſibly find in it? The law in his regard is no more than a rigorous order, accompanied with threats, and followed by chaſtiſements on the infringers: if thou do not this, if thou do not abſtain thyſelf from that, thou ſhalt be damned.

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damned. When we consider the law in such a manner as this, it is impossible that whilst we obey it, we should not deem it severe; and so much the more so, as it commands what is repugnant to nature, and forbids that with which nature is pleased. Hence as the fear of chastisement does not combat, by any contrary affection, our evil inclinations, it leaves their attractives in their full force, and inspires no relish for virtue, nor aversion from evil. The will is compelled to bend to the commandment, but is not inclined to it; it feels the violence which it offers to itself, and is only determined towards that which constrains, from the apprehension of a much greater evil. A disposition like this is that of a slave, who trembles under the rod of his master, and who only obeys to escape the lash.

In some others this fear is blended with mercenary views; they are animated by the hope of reward, which somewhat lessens the burden; but as the reward is at a distance, and the pain is present, this more forcibly acts upon them, and is more strongly felt, though the expectation of the promises they have received, supports them under their load. If charity rendered their faith more lively, and their hope more pure: if in the reward they expect, they had God in view more than themselves, the love of him, and the desire of possessing him

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would ſweeten their yoke. But faith is weak, and hope is combated by fear in thoſe who only liſten to their intereſt; and ſelf-love, which is their chief motive, cannot induce them to love a law that is deſigned to deſtroy it.

Finally, in conſequence to theſe diſpoſitions, which too much prevail among the generality of chriſtians, they take up the yoke of the Lord but as little as they can, and only what is neceſſary, according to their condition, to ſhun hell, or to obtain heaven. In nothing do they aim at perfection; they freely ſet aſide what is not of obligation, and without much nicety, and in a manner merely human, diſcharge the bulk of their duties. But from the moment that they are determined thus to ſpare themſelves trouble, it is not poſſible not to feel the full weight of it, and God on his part does nothing to relieve them, becauſe he grants relief but to thoſe who act through love; and who for his ſake do not ſpare themſelves.

I confine myſelf to the commandments, is it ſaid; I carry of the burden but what is indiſpenſable, and yet it ſeems very heavy; what then would it be, were I to load myſelf more, and were to undertake to pleaſe God in every thing? my ſtrength would fail me, I ſhould be overpowered! You are groſsly miſtaken; it would be quite the reverſe. In order to taſte the ſweetneſs of the yoke of the Lord, it muſt be

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be taken up in its entire and with good will, without granting any thing to nature. The more you diminish of this burden, the more that which you retain of it, weighs upon you; and on the contrary you walk with so much more ease, as you are resolved to take nothing from it. The reason of which is evident; because in the first place, it is love alone that can inspire such a resolution; and secondly, because God, even for the interest of his glory, is engaged powerfully to support the christian who embraces his service, in its full extent. Now a soul that love puts into action, and that grace supports, is immensely strong; it is capable of the greatest atchievements; there are no hardships which it does not devour, and which do not seem sweet, because they increase its love. Do you then imagine that it is to timid and interested souls, and who enter into a reckoning with God, that Jesus Christ has said that his yoke is sweet and his burden light? By no means; such a thing cannot be. He has only spoken thus to great and generous souls, who in all things are determined to follow the inspiration of grace: and such souls alone experience the truth of his words.

O my Saviour, if hitherto I have not had this experience, it is my own fault. Should such a master as thou art be served through fear, or even through interest? After what thou deserv'st,

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ſerveſt, and what thou haſt done for me, can I do otherwiſe than give myſelf up to thy ſervice through love and through gratitude? Can I be ſurpriſed that a yoke which I do not love, ſhould ſeem to me ſevere, and that a burden which I carry with a reluctance, ſhould overpower me with its weight. Change my diſpoſitions, O my God! Subſtitute love to fear; purify, perfect my hope with the fire of charity; dilate my heart, which ſelf-love has always kept contracted: then the more I ſhall be loaded, the faſter I ſhall run in the way of thy commandments; the more ſhall I congratulate myſelf for the happineſs of being ſubmitted to thy yoke. All is poſſible; all is eaſy and ſweet to love. I know it; I have experienced it with reſpect to creatures; grant that I may experience it with reſpect to thee. *Amen.*

TWENTY-

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TWENTY-THIRD LESSON.

ON CARRYING OUR CROSS.

Of all the gospel-sayings, the following seems the hardest to the generality of christians: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me* *. The evangelist observes, *that he said to all.* From whence it follows, that there is not one among those who profess christianity, that ought not to apply it to himself. It is according to order that the disciple should follow the Master, and walk in his footsteps. Jesus Christ does not propose to us the cross, till after that he himself had carried his own daily, from his birth to his last breath. He carried it, having freely accepted it from the hands of his Father; and how dreadful soever it was to nature, of which it exacted the total immolation, he accepted and carried it with love and with joy, being satisfied with the reparation of God's glory, and the redemption of mankind, by the sacrifice of his soul and body.

The christian, therefore, at his example, ought to receive the cross that God sends him, ought

* Luke ix. 23.

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ought willingly to carry it daily, and think himſelf happy that by ſo doing he accompliſhes the eternal deſigns of his Maker. This is the eſſential condition, in order to appertain to Jeſus Chriſt; and he who does not ſubmit to it, is rejected from the number of his followers. But what lot can we expect in the life to come, if we do not appear in it with the title of diſciple of Chriſt? Is not this enough to ſweeten whatever this ſaying contains that is hard and frightful to nature?

But let us examine a little, and ſee if it really be as diſheartening as it at firſt appears. If by the croſs, which Jeſus Chriſt commands us to carry, we mean the ordinary duties of religion, and the practice of the morality of the goſpel; I have juſt been ſhewing that this yoke is ſweet, and this burden light: of which therefore we cannot complain, without the greateſt injuſtice, and without contradicting truth itſelf.

But we more generally apply the name of croſs to certain events of providence, whether natural or ſupernatural, which thwart and humble us, which occaſion ſorrow or pain, and which variouſly exerciſe us. Theſe croſſes happen to us either from nature, ſuch as the defects of the body, infirmities, and ſickneſs; or from our condition, ſuch as poverty, labour, and dependance; or from the ſtate of life we have embraced, ſuch as marriage; or from the injuſtice

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injuſtice of men, or from fortuitous accidents, or from the malice of the devils; or finally, immediately from God. Theſe croſſes afflict us in our health, in our fortunes, in our repoſe, in our reputation, in our perſons, or in thoſe that are dear to us; they mortify our ſenſibility, our pride, our ſelf-love; they exact of us diverſe ſacrifices, both of thought and of action.

When croſſes are taken in this acceptation, which is the moſt common one, they are in general appendants to human nature; and there is no one who abſolutely can avoid them. Each one has his croſſes, ſome greater and more numerous, others leſs and fewer; but no man is entirely exempt from them. From whence comes the epithet of *unhappy*, given to all mortals, by the authors of the remoteſt antiquity. In the intention of God, they are in our regard a mean of ſalvation, and the particular way by which he means to conduct us to heaven.

I obſerve in the firſt place, with reſpect to theſe croſſes, that excluſive of certain inward ſufferings, for which God requires an expreſs conſent, which is rarely the caſe; the others happen to us againſt our will, whether through our own fault, or not; that moſt frequently it is not in our power either to foreſee them or to ſhun them, or to free ourſelves from them; and that the only way, which reaſon itſelf ſuggeſts,

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geſts, is to bear them with fortitude and patience.

I moreover obſerve that the different reſources or means which man, when left to himſelf, can make uſe of to alleviate his croſſes, are of very trifling avail; becauſe nature almoſt always is more prevalent than reaſon; becauſe the conſolations given us by our friends, have no great effect, and often are troubleſome; becauſe our own reflections are very weak helps: becauſe though ſome may be alleviated by time, there are others which with time becomes greater; in ſhort, becauſe there are croſſes of ſuch a nature as not to be ſuſceptible of any human aſſuagement, and which religion alone can allay.

I alſo obſerve, that it is not only uſeleſs to be impatient, to complain, or to ſink into deſpondency; but that inſtead of diminiſhing our pain, all complaints ſerve only to aggravate it; not to ſpeak of the ſins, ſometimes very grievous, which our repining cauſes us to commit.

Theſe obſervations preſuppoſed, what does Jeſus Chriſt require of us? that we ſhould receive our croſs as coming from the hand of God; that we ourſelves ſhould take it up, and carry it cheerfully with an entire ſubmiſſion to his will. As if he ſhould ſay: Do not reſiſt the abſolute appointment of the ſovereign Maſter; it would afford you no relief; on the contrary,

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your ſoul would be every way the loſer. But yield to the diſpoſitions of his wiſdom, his juſtice, and of his mercy towards you; accommodate yourſelf to it with good grace; and if you be not ſufficiently perfect to accept with gratitude and love, when he ſends what is painful, bear it at leaſt with humble reſignation, and let your temporal evils become uſeful to your ſalvation. Thus will your croſs be infallibly made lighter, as well as meritorious; you engage God to give you ſupernatural ſtrength; you not only arrive at ſuffering without repugnance, but alſo at making it a ſubject of joy and conſolation. Is there any thing more reaſonable, more religious, more friendly to man than ſuch a morality? and could the eternal Wiſdom come down from heaven to inſtruct us, or read us a more uſeful leſſon?

It is not required that you ſhould wiſh for croſſes, that you ſhould go in ſearch of them, that you ſhould pray God to ſend them; nor that you ſhould ſay to him, like St. Thereſa, that your life would be inſupportable without them; nor that you chooſe, like St. John of the Croſs, no other reward of your labours for the glory of God, than to ſuffer and be deſpiſed for his ſake. Such ſentiments as theſe only appertain to ſouls of a ſpecial election, and ſuppoſe that they have acquired a very high degree of perfection, or they are the effect of a particular

lar inſpiration. That which is demanded of you is to wait for your croſſes without going to meet them, and not to be ſurpriſed, whenever they befal you, as if you were privileged to have an exemption from them; it is humbly to ſubmit to them, when you have no other reſource; it is to bear them with patience; to bring to your aſſiſtance the great motives of religion; to have recourſe with confidence to God that he may ſupport you, and firmly to hope that he will not abandon you. Is there any thing in this that can ſeem to you ſevere? or even any thing that is not ſweet and conſoling? I venture to advance that you would ſeek in vain elſewhere any conſolation that can come up to this.

To what do you pretend? To live without croſſes? You therefore would have it that God ſhould eſtabliſh in your behalf a new order of things; and that he ſhould diſpenſe with you in a law, in which he has not diſpenſed with his Son. Ever ſince the introduction of ſin upon the earth, croſſes, being the puniſhment and the expiation of it, are become neceſſary, both to avenge the juſtice of God, and to purify us from our iniquities. Are you not a ſinner, and perhaps a great ſinner? by what title then can you expect exemption from croſſes?

Do you pretend at leaſt to have the choice of your croſſes? For you often ſay or think, were

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it any other croſs, I ſhould willingly endure it. In this you are miſtaken. The croſs which you carry is alway that which is heavy and diſpleaſing: you would ſay as much of every other under which you might be; and perhaps you might find it to be ſtill more burdenſome. The evil that is preſent always ſeems greater than that which is abſent; and if we deſire what is abſent, it is only through impatience that we do. If croſſes were left to your own choice, you would not take up any, or you would chooſe wrong, and you would repent it. God knows beſt what is expedient for you; he loves you more than you love yourſelf; he chooſes better for you than you would chooſe for yourſelf; and if he ſtrikes in a ſenſible part, it is becauſe the evil lies there, which he means to heal. Moreover a croſs that ſhould be at the diſpoſal of your ſelf-love, which ever way you might carry it, would not be either pleaſing to God, or advantageous to your ſalvation.

Once more, what do you pretend to? that your croſs ſhould make you ſuffer leſs? That depends upon yourſelf. Ceaſe to rebel againſt it; do not repel it by uſeleſs endeavours; embrace it, love it, ſtick you cloſe to it, ſince it ſticks cloſe to you; it will then become lighter. It is not the pain that renders the croſs inſufferable, but the reſiſtance of the will.

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How ſtrange is the pride of man! how inconceiveable his ſelf-love! He is indignant at his condition that ſubjects him to croſſes; and it is he himſelf who by his ſin is the author of his condition: he has done the evil, and rejects the remedy; he is guilty, and he refuſes the chaſtiſement and the reparation that would reſtore him to grace. That is, he has made himſelf wretched, and perſiſts in remaining ſo; becauſe he will not be cured of the vices that have occaſioned his wretchedneſs. For what elſe are all croſſes but remedies againſt pride, which they humble, and againſt ſelf-love which they mortify? Accept them, and you are cured.

If you ſtand in need of motives, religion will furniſh you in abundance. It takes them from your own intereſt; you have to ſatisfy the juſtice of God; leave to him the care of avenging himſelf by croſſes. When this vengeance is exerciſed upon earth, it is quite full of mercy. Do not expoſe yourſelf to the pure and inexorable juſtice of the life to come. Your daily ſins, to be expiated, ſtand in need of croſſes that are daily; and they are the beſt penance for the grievous offences you may have formerly committed; becauſe it is God himſelf who enjoins it.

It takes them from that immenſe weight of glory and of endleſs happineſs that is to be the reward

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reward of your humiliations and tranſitory afflictions. Is it buying heaven too dear, to ſuffer a little, and for a ſhort time here below, in order to gain it? What pains do you not take, what ſacrifices do you not make, to what dangers do you not expoſe yourſelf for the eſtabliſhment of your temporal fortune? you do not regret whatſoever it has coſt you: and you are unwilling it ſhould coſt you any thing to ſecure your eternal felicity? you are devoid of all faith, you are no chriſtian.

It takes them from the example of Jeſus Chriſt; who preaches to you the croſs, but as loaded with his own, which reunites and ſurpaſſes the croſſes of all mankind put together. It is in your name, and in quality of your repreſentative, that he carries it; it is through a quite gratuitous love for you. He ſtood not in need of carrying it for himſelf, being without ſin; he could have refuſed it; and by refuſing, you would have been irremediably loſt; and all the croſſes accumulated upon you throughout the longeſt life, never could have opened to you the gates of heaven, nor efface the ſmalleſt of your ſins.

It takes them from the neceſſity under which chriſtians are of reſembling Jeſus Chriſt, in order to be amongſt the elect. For he has been given to us as a model; and it is chiefly on the mountain of Calvary that this Man of ſorrows,

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ſorrows, this Man *ſtruck by God and humbled* is offered to our imitation. It is therefore by carrying the croſs, it is by living and expiring on the croſs that we are to reſemble him. It was neceſſary, as he himſelf declares, that the Chriſt ſhould ſuffer, and ſo enter into his glory; and muſt not the chriſtian ſuffer! and ſhall he ſhare in the glory of Jeſus Chriſt, without ſharing with him in his chalice!

It takes them from the gratitude we owe to God the Father, who has loved us ſo as to give us his only Son; and which we owe to his adorable Son, whom love has led to deliver himſelf up for us.

It takes them from the great precept of the love of God. What is a love that ſtops at barren ſentiments, that is unwilling to undergo any trial, that has not the courage to make any ſacrifice? It is a falſe and illuſory love, which does not even impoſe upon men, and how ſhould it impoſe upon God? But croſſes are the trials to which God puts our love; they are the ſacrifices which he expects from it. Receive them therefore, if not with eagerneſs, at leaſt with ſubmiſſion; or ceaſe ſaying that you love him.

Laſtly, it takes them from the powerful helps which God always joins to the croſſes he is pleaſed to ſend us. Had you to carry them alone, you would have ſubject to complain, and

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and to alledge your weakneſs. But God himſelf then becomes your ſtrength; but Jeſus Chriſt carries your croſs with you; and he not only aſſiſts you, he alſo comforts you; he fills you with a quite heavenly joy amidſt your afflictions; he finds out the ſecret of rendering them ſo amiable, as would make you regret your being delivered from them. This is what all the ſaints have atteſted, the apoſtles at the head of them. *They went from the preſence of the council*, ſays St. Luke, *rejoicing, that they were accounted worthy to ſuffer reproach for the name of Jeſus* *. St. Paul humbled himſelf at his revelations, and gloried in his croſſes.

Have I ſaid enough to juſtify the goſpel, and to give you a reliſh for its maxims and language on the ſubject of croſſes? You admire what the philoſophers have written on it, and the fine reaſons they have made uſe of to elevate man above the calamities of life. I allow you to admire them. But through what injuſtice do you refuſe thoſe encomiums to the goſpel, which you ſo laviſhly beſtow on human wiſdom? Is the goſpel inferior to that, and does it inſpire us with ſentiments that are leſs ſublime? Does it forbid you to make uſe of the means ſuggeſted to you by reaſon? and becauſe it ſets others before you that are infinitely ſuperior, and of a quite different efficacy, is it to be leſs worthy of

* Acts v. 41.

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of your praiſe? But I underſtand you: in the books of the philoſophers you only ſee an authority that is human, that binds you in nothing, and a fine ſpeculation which without any conſequence you admire: whereas the goſpel is veſted with the character of an authority divine, under which the will is to bend, and to approve it, is to engage to practice it. But can you be ſo blind as not to ſee that you have no longer any excuſe, if reaſon that flows from God, and the divine authority which is the ſupreme reaſon, concur to condemn you? Either reject reaſon together with the goſpel, and give yourſelf up to the inſtinct of proud and ſenſual nature, that abhors humiliation and ſuffering; or if you approve a reaſon that has nothing but weak motives to offer, approve the goſpel ſtill more, that ſupports you by motives incomparably more forcible.

I ſubmit, O my Saviour, and I acknowledge thy divine wiſdom in the language thou holdeſt relative to croſſes. The very thought of them alarms and ſhocks nature. I eaſily conceive it; it is ſick, and the worſt of it is, it loves its malady, and rejects a cure. Wo unto me, if I liſten to it any more. In ſo important a concern, I will only liſten to the light of reaſon, to the light of the goſpel, and to that of thy grace; and in preſence of ſo many re-united lights, I will ſilence the falſe reaſonings of pride and

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and self-love. Crosses are inevitable; I must resolve to carry them like a man of courage; reason tells me so. Crosses are necessary; I cannot expiate my sins, nor merit heaven, but through them: religion teaches me so. It also teaches me that crosses should be precious to me for the resemblance it gives me with Jesus, for the character of predestination, which they stamp on me, and for the means which they furnish me of approving myself to God, and to thee, my Redeemer, by my gratitude and love. My mind is convinced; but do thou touch my heart, and cause me to love what through so many titles, it is my interest to cherish; let me no longer fear them, or repine under them; may I carry them in silence and in patience, resigned, submissive, and united with thy holy will; may I bless and love thee, as Job and Tobias, in all the trials that thou shalt be pleased to send me. *Amen.*

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TWENTY-FOURTH LESSON.

ON PEACE OF MIND AND HEART.

BEING on the point of quitting the earth, and on the very eve of his death, Jesus Christ spoke to his apostles the following consoling words: *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you* *. I leave it to you as an inheritance, by my last will and testament, as the most precious of my goods: *my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, do I give unto you.* You are going to lose my sensible presence, but I shall abundantly indemnify you for that, by my spiritual presence. I am *the peace*; it is one of the titles given to me by the prophets; I am so, as I am *the truth and the life*. I consequently do not leave you; I continue to dwell with you, by leaving with you my peace. I give it to you, and I establish it in the midst of your hearts. In possessing it, you will possess me in a manner more intimate and sure; men will not be able to rob you of this possession against your wills, as they are going to deprive you of the advantage of possessing me corporally. This peace will make your happiness; it will be your strength

* Joan. xiv. 27.

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ſtrength in the perſecutions to which you are going to be expoſed. The world will riſe up againſt you, but it will render you invincible againſt all its attacks, and make you triumphant.

The apoſtles did not then underſtand the deep ſenſe of the words of their Maſter, nor the inеſtimable advantages of ſuch a gift. But when they had received the Holy Ghoſt, they were enlightened; and not only did they know, but alſo felt what bleſſing our Saviour had left them, from the heavenly joy with which they were filled, and from the ſupernatural force with which they found themſelves veſted.

What Jeſus Chriſt left to his firſt diſciples, he promiſes to all chriſtians; he is always ready to give them his peace, and it is their fault if they do not receive it; or if, after having received it, they know not how to preſerve it. If they knew the greatneſs of this gift, and with how many bleſſings it enriches the ſoul, what would they not do to obtain it, and what care would they not take to retain it? Inſtruct them, O Lord, and ſpeak to their heart, whilſt I am going to ſpeak to their mind, according to the lights that thou ſhalt give me. I ſhall not exhauſt this ſubject, which is moſt extenſive, and to which might be reduced whatever is the moſt perfect in an inward life. But I ſhall ſay enough to put thoſe who are of good will in

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the way of desiring and ardently seeking so great a blessing.

It is a fact which cannot be disputed, if in the least we reflect on ourselves, that the human heart only aspires after peace and repose; that all its motions have only for their object to procure that peace, in which, with reason, it establishes its happiness; and that the continual agitation it is in, proceeds from its not being in the way to find it. But why does it not find it, notwithstanding so many and such persevering endeavours? It is because it seeks it without examination, and because, in fact, it is unacquainted with it, as it has never taken pains to find out its definition.

Let us listen to St. Austin, who says, that *Peace is the tranquillity of order*. To enjoy peace, two things are necessary: to be in order, and that this order should be stable. Where there is no order, there is no peace; and where order is deranged, there peace is disturbed. This definition is both clear and precise. Apply it to things physical, moral, and political, you will feel its full exactness. And to ascend to the first Being, why does God enjoy an unalterable peace? It is because he is order itself, the essential and immutable order. God can no more derange the order that constitutes him, nor lose his peace, than he can lose his existence. Why is heaven the abode of peace? It is because God

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God cauſes to reign among the bleſſed, and in each one of them, an image of the order that reigns in himſelf; and being inſeparably united to him, they partake of his peace, as much as they partake of his order.

If peace relative to the bleſſed and even to God himſelf be the tranquillity of order, it therefore muſt be the ſame relative to man upon earth; and he has no peace to hope for, unleſs he puts himſelf into order, and perſeveres in it. Now, as the order that is in God, is his own nature, ſo the order that is out of God, is his holy will. Hence, to be perfectly ſubmiſſive and united in all things to the divine will, is the order with regard to an intelligent creature; which by ranging itſelf under this order, enters into the way of peace, and by maintaining itſelf in it, maintains itſelf in peace; by ſwerving from that way, it deviates from peace.

Let us now conſult our heart, and we ſhall have a full conviction of what I advance. Is it calm? does it wiſh for nothing? does it fear nothing? does it reproach itſelf with nothing? does it apprehend nothing from ſelf-examination? in a word, is it ſatisfied with the actual ſtate it is in? If ſo, it is a proof that it is in order through an entire ſubmiſſion to the will of God: as alſo, upon its having this ſubmiſſion, it may be aſſured that it poſſeſſes peace. Has it any inquietudes, any deſires

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ſires that tranſport it, any fears that contract it, any anxieties that fatigue it, any remorſes that tear it? dare it not enter into itſelf? finally, is it diſſatisfied with its preſent diſpoſition? with certainty you may conclude that it is not in order, nor ruled in all things by the will of God. In like manner, if it has quitted order, it is impoſſible that it ſhould not be reſtleſs and tormented. Diſorder and inquietude are two things inſeparable in the human heart, as well as order and peace. The greater the diſorder is, the greater is the inquietude, whatever efforts we may make to ſtifle it: ſo alſo does peace increaſe in proportion to the conformity to order. This rule is univerſal, invariable, and infallible.

There is therefore no peace for man, whilſt his will is oppoſed to the will of God, in whatſoever manner it is made known to him, either by the natural law, or by revelation, or by inward inſpiration; and he always enjoys peace as long as he conforms himſelf to what God requires of him. But as this conformity and this oppoſition relate to objects that are more or leſs important, and as they comprehend a variety of degrees, peace alſo is more or leſs perfect, and the inquietude more or leſs affecting.

A ſoul in the ſtate of grace does not loſe its eſſential peace: becauſe that ſtate having charity, the ſoul is united to God, and ſwerves not

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not from abſolute order, which requires the practice of the commandments. But if in other reſpects it be imperfect, remiſs and unmortified; if it reſiſt the views of God towards it; if it ſtill be liable to deſires and fears, to natural inclinations or averſions; all theſe faults bring on agitation and trouble, whereby its peace is more or leſs diſcompoſed.

Hence peace is eſtabliſhed and perfected in us, by the care we take to mortify our heart, and to keep it in a dependance on grace, which only tends to bring it under ſubjection to the divine will, to elevate man daily to a higher degree of conformity with God, and conſequently of order and of peace. On the contrary, our peace inſenſibly diminiſhes and weakens, when we nouriſh within us inordinate affections, and liſten to nature to the prejudice of grace. From whence it follows, that holineſs and inward peace mutually correſpond; that this is the effect, and that the cauſe; and that chriſtian morality in teaching us the way to holineſs, teaches us at the ſame time the way to peace. This morality, therefore, is moſt friendly to man, as it has no other drift than his happineſs, even in this life.

For peace of heart and mind is, without diſpute, the firſt bleſſing in life, and the ſource of all other bleſſings. Without peace we cannot be happy, even in the re-union of all the advantages

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vantages and pleasures of the earth; and with it we always are happy, were we even deprived of the other blessings, which at bottom are but a feeble accessory, which a peaceable heart can readily forego. I do not fear contradiction, by advancing that all inward disquietude embitters the sweetest enjoyments: whereas peace of mind renders light and supportable even the greatest evils, as long as they leave us the free use of our reason.

Now this peace of mind is a moral good which must be always accompanied with a strong determination to combat every vice, and to acquire every virtue; it is even the fruit and the reward of such a determination; and cannot hope to enjoy it, if there be one single vice, and one single passion which we consent to foster, or one single virtue which we neglect to cultivate. It is not even sufficient, in order to possess it to a high degree, to war upon grosser vices and passions that are criminal, we must even attack and pursue our smallest imperfections, and root up every fibre that can nourish our self-love. As long as you love yourself improperly; as long as you seek yourself in any thing, even in what is spiritual, and shall not have stifled every seed of corrupt nature, you will be exposed to inquietude, to trouble, sadness, tediousness, sensibility, and jealousy; all which are enemies to peace, and which, if they do not

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not baniſh from the heart, they prevent it at leaſt from being reliſhed.

Nor muſt we imagine that the combats we have to engage in for the extirpation of vices, and the acquiſition of virtues, are incompatible with inward peace, for they rather conſolidate it, and render it undiſturbed. If you had not this ſolid peace, you would not be in a condition to combat; you would have no ſtrength, and the leaſt trifle would overſet you. It is, in fact, very remarkable, that the ſoul is never more weak, and never more eaſily overcome, than when it is troubled; and that on the contrary, when it is in peace, it is ſtrong, and almoſt ſure of victory. It is but the ſurface of the ſoul that is agitated in our violences with ourſelves, in our painful ſacrifices, in our temptations and trials. There is then an inward conflict that exerciſes the powers of the ſoul; but the fund is always peaceable, as long as we do not yield; for when we yield, the fund itſelf is diſturbed, and conſcience no longer is tranquil.

Peace is a gift of God, and the moſt precious of his gifts; it is the fruit of the charity that dwells in the heart; and he who ſays charity, ſays God; for *God is charity*, according to St. John; and it is upon this account that peace is habitual, like charity. The ſentiment and the reliſh of peace is tranſient; God communi-

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cates it by intervals, as he pleaſes. But the ſtate itſelf of its own nature is fixed; and it always would be ſo, if the ſoul put no obſtacle to it; becauſe God never is the firſt to abandon a heart, of which he has taken poſſeſſion; and always unwillingly withdraws; the heart muſt drive him away along with its peace. Hence here below the gift of peace on the part of God is an engagement to give us the eternal peace that conſtitutes the felicity of the bleſſed; or to ſpeak more properly, it is the ſame peace, which whilſt upon earth we can loſe, but which cannot be loſt in heaven. From hence we may judge how careful we ſhould be to preſerve it; ſince as long as it dwells in us, it is like a ſure pledge of our future felicity.

The world promiſes peace alſo; it muſt *ſo*, elſe who would follow it? who would be of its partiſans? But what ſort of peace does it promiſe? a falſe peace, and quite oppoſite to that of God; a peace that conſiſts in ſatisfying the ſenſes, the paſſions, pride, and ſelf-love; a peace that ſtops at the ſurface of the ſoul, and never goes any farther. Neither does it beſtow this kind of peace, but for very ſhort moments, which are preſently ſucceeded by a more violent agitation than before; or by a diſguſt, a laſſitude, and an irkſome wearineſs. Worldlings intimately feel that they have been deceived; they have made trial of all the objects

objects that the world offers to their paſſions, and not one has given contentment; nothing remains but a void, an irritation, and a ſtronger craving after the fruition; from hence ariſe new deſires, which are not better ſatisfied; or elſe ſatiety and the deſpair of ever being happy. In this terminates the peace of the world, and to this is the worldling brought by his doleful reflections on the illuſions by which he has been ſeduced. He has run all his life after peace, which always has fled from him. He has ſometimes ſeized the ſhadow of it, but this very ſhadow has ſlipped from him. He has ſeen himſelf happy in dreams, but on waking, he ſighs at finding his hands empty.

To convert the partiſans of the world, I would only wiſh to engage them to reflect ſomewhat ſeriouſly on the cauſes of the agitation that torments them, of the wearineſs that conſumes them, of the impoſſibility they are under of dwelling with themſelves, and of the need in which they ſtand of conſtant diſſipation. Do you enjoy peace? would I aſk. On quitting the tumult of affairs or of pleaſures, when you enter into yourſelves, do you find that your heart is at reſt? If they be ſincere, they will anſwer in the negative. But if they have no peace, what enjoyment can they have? What becomes of all their hopes that are ſolely grounded on the things of this life? and what will

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will be their lot in the next? The peace, therefore, of the world is in a perfect oppoſition to that of God; it is fugitive, deceitful, imaginary, and never is poſſeſſed; and after death it is followed with an inexplicable and endleſs trouble in that place of darkneſs and horror, *where there is no order* *; thus is hell characteriſed in Scripture.

If I am aſked, to whom God grants his peace? I anſwer, that he grants it to every one who wiſhes to have it, and diſpoſes himſelf as he ought, to obtain it. In the firſt place, there is a grace which he communicates with ſanctifying grace, which children enjoy as long as they retain their innocence; and no trouble moleſts them, till after they have been guilty of ſome grievous tranſgreſſion. This peace is almoſt always accompanied with a ſenſible ſweetneſs, at the reconciliation of a ſinner to God. By comparing his preſent ſtate with the former, he feels himſelf diſburdened from a heavy load; his oppreſſed and fettered heart recovers a freedom, to which he had long been a ſtranger, and is filled with a torrent of peace and delight.

But there is another peace that is much more excellent, that falls to the ſhare of the favourites of God; of thoſe who chooſe to be his without any reſerve; who are determined to follow in all things the inſpiration of grace, to never

* Job, x. 22.

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never allow themſelves any deliberate tranſgreſſion; to mortify in all things their corrupt nature, and never to refuſe any ſacrifice to God. Whilſt remiſs and imperfect chriſtians are the ſport of their imagination, of their thoughts, of their little paſſions, and their ſelf-love, which inceſſantly fatigue and moleſt them; whilſt they are habitually defective, and with ſome reaſon uneaſy about their inward diſpoſitions, thoſe I here ſpeak of are in an unalterable calmneſs; God does not diſturb them, becauſe he is ſatisfied with their conduct; they do not diſturb themſelves, becauſe they reflect but little; as they are taught by grace not to be too curious about their interior, and alſo becauſe they have no juſt reaſon for uneaſineſs. The rebellions of nature are not prejudicial to their peace, becauſe they are vigilant in preventing them, and quick in quelling them. All the ſmiles, or the frowns of the world, hardly make any impreſſion on them, being early habituated to deſpiſe them. If at a very great diſtance they experience ſome agitations, they are light and of ſhort duration. As to the trouble they may feel under trials and temptations, it is only in the powers of the ſoul, without attacking the fund of it; it is an involuntary and purifying trouble, a trouble that gives occaſion for the moſt generous ſacrifices, and for the exerciſe of the ſublimeſt virtues; a trouble, in

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ſhort, of the ſame nature with that which it pleaſed our Lord to experience, without prejudice to his peace. As ſoon as the ſtorm ceaſes, the ſerenity returns, and the calm is more profound, and more delicious than before.

This is that *peace of God* of which St. Paul ſpeaks, *which ſurpaſſeth all underſtanding*, or ſentiment *, and which cannot be underſtood by thoſe who have not experienced it. In proportion as we advance in dying to ourſelves, and in our union with God, we make progreſs in this peace, and at laſt we arrive at a ſtate of ſupernatural inſenſibility and quietude, which nearly approaches to the divine immobility. No external power, no human event, no temptation, no effort from hell can rob the ſoul of ſo precious a peace; it has only itſelf to fear, its own remiſſneſs, or its preſumption; and as long as it ſteers clear of theſe two rocks, by fervor and humility it will be ſafe.

It ſometimes happens that God prevents with ſuch a peace ſome certain ſouls who have done nothing to deſerve it; but on which he has great deſigns. Who could expreſs their ſurpriſe when they find themſelves on a ſudden inveſted with it! They know not from whence this their happineſs proceeds; but God is not ſlow in making known to them his will. This ſpeciah

* Phil. iv. 7.

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ſpecial gift is neceſſary to induce them to accept and ſupport the long and dreadful trials through which he would have them paſs. In general, this peace is the reward of many years of labour, of fidelity, and of inward and outward mortification. The ſame ſpiritual exerciſes that procure it, ſerve to maintain and increaſe it. As we ought to uſe every means to acquire it, we ought to neglect nothing to preſerve it. If we be culpable by rendering ourſelves unworthy of ſuch a gift, we are more ſo when through our own fault we loſe it, and rarely is recovered again.

I muſt not omit that this peace is the ſelf-ſame thing as habitual prayer, which never is interrupted in our exterior occupations, as long as they are in the order of providence, and when we conduct ourſelves in them according to the ſpirit of grace. As long as the ſoul is inwardly in peace, it is in peace, it is in prayer, and reciprocally. As it is not neceſſary that it ſhould think of its peace, or that it ſhould feel it, in order to poſſeſs it, neither is it neceſſary that it ſhould think of its prayer, in order to practiſe it. Only that this peace generally renders itſelf more ſenſible during the times that are allotted for prayer, becauſe then we are alone with God, and have no object to diſtract us.

Thoſe

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Thoſe chriſtians who lead not a life ſufficiently holy, in order to maintain themſelves in the eſſential peace, that is annexed to ſanctifying grace, are greatly to be pitied. Their ſtate, whilſt it laſts, excludes them from the only happineſs there is in this life; and they hazard at every moment their eternal ſalvation. Thoſe who are careful to preſerve themſelves habitually from mortal ſin; but who are not fervent enough to give themſelves wholly to God, and to allow nothing to nature, ſuffer alſo an ineſtimable loſs, in being deprived throughout their whole life of the ſecond peace, of which the preſence of God, inward recollection, and habitual prayer are the fruit. I ſhould think myſelf happy, if the little I have been ſaying contributed to cure the blindneſs of the former, and correct the remiſſneſs of the latter.

Alas! how many years have I ſpent in the intoxication of the falſe peace of the world, and far from the true peace which thou, O my God, giveſt to thy ſervants! I have taſted it, when I have returned to thee; but have I endeavoured to increaſe it by my fidelity in thy ſervice, and to merit that other delicious peace, that is reſerved for thy friends? It depended upon me to obtain it. Thou haſt attracted me towards it; but I reſiſted thy attraction. Thou haſt inſpired me with views of devotion and

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and perfection, but I have not followed them. Insane that I was, I refused my own happiness. O my Saviour, if it be as yet time, put me on the ways of peace; my heart only sighs after that; grant it me with a redoubled fervor and fidelity; that with it and through it I may arrive at the abode of the eternal peace. *Amen.*

TWENTY.

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TWENTY-FIFTH LESSON.

ON HUMILITY.

THE leſſon which Jeſus Chriſt has had the moſt at heart for us to reliſh, is that of humility; he inculcates it in every page of his goſpel; and that which has been the moſt conſpicuous in his life, is humility. No other has ſaid to mankind, either before or after him: *Learn of me, that I am humble of heart* *. No other but he has had a right to give us ſuch a leſſon; and in order to have this right, to what a condition has he reduced himſelf? what has he not done? what has he not ſuffered? what has it not coſt him? But at the ſame time, after his example, who can refuſe to embrace his doctrine, how reluctant ſoever the pride of man may be? alas! rooted as it is in our heart, it cannot ſtand againſt what Jeſus Chriſt has done to unroot it, if we rightly conceive the diſorder and the injuſtice of it.

As it is his own humility which Jeſus Chriſt propoſes to our imitation, let us firſt of all conſider what were the characters of humility in this God-Man. Jeſus Chriſt was humble as much

* Matt. xi. 29.

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much as a ſoul could be that knew in the moſt perfect manner the infinite being of God, and the nothingneſs of the creature; and he not only had the knowledge of theſe too abyſſes of the infinite Being and of the nothing; but he had alſo the moſt lively and profound ſentiment of them, uniting in his own perſon both the one and the other. By means of this wonderful aſſemblage of two extremes, the idea which on the one hand he had of the grandeur of God, of his ſovereign dominion, and of the glory that is due to him; and on the other hand, of his own lowlineſs as man, of his dependance, and if I may be allowed the expreſſion, of his abſolute nullity, was ſuch, that it is impoſſible for a mere creature to comprehend it. The ſentiment correſponded with the idea; and the weight of the one and the other was ſo oppreſſive, that his holy humanity would have ſunk under it, had it not been ſupported by the all-powerful virtue of the divinity. What humility therefore was that, which required the greateſt of miracles, to enable his ſoul to bear up with it! What muſt have been the reſpect, the adoration, the continual annihilation of all his created being before the ſupreme Being! The joint homages of angels and of men are nothing in compariſon of his. The mind is loſt, when it would ſtop to conſider what Jeſus Chriſt as man was in his own eyes, by oppoſing

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fing his own nothingneſs to the divine Being—ſuch was the firſt character of his humility.

Jeſus Chriſt was humble, as much as a ſoul could be that was hypoſtatically united to the divinity, and dependant upon it in all his free operations both ſupernatural and natural. He had not one ſingle thought, nor one ſingle ſentiment; he did not do one ſingle human action through any other principle than that of the Word, which ruled his humanity; never did he aſcribe any thing, nor refer any thing, to that holy humanity, as its own work. And how could he have done it? it was not a perſon; it had no *ſelf*: in this reſpect it was null, and abſorbed in the *ſelf* of the Word, the finite in the infinite. Who could explain, who could conceive this kind of annihilation, and its conſequences, with reſpect to the humility of Jeſus Chriſt! This virtue was in him as ineffable as the union itſelf from whence it reſulted. Whatſoever he thought or ſaid of himſelf, his thoughts and ſayings always terminated towards the Word as agent. I now aſk, were not the gifts of God, the virtues, the merits, in ſafety and ſcreened from all rapine in a ſoul that was thus a ſtranger to itſelf, and diveſted of property? Do we now underſtand ſomething of the ſaying of St. Paul? *Jeſus Chriſt did not pleaſe himſelf**. Notwithſtanding the plenitude, or rather on account of *the plenitude of*

* Rom. xv. 3.

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of the Godhead, that dwelleth in him corporally *, according to the ſame apoſtle, he could not have pride or ſelf-love, becauſe the *ſelf* which in a created being is the root of both the one and the other, did not reſide in him according to his human nature.—Second character of his humility.

Jeſus Chriſt was as humble as he could be, who, in quality of repreſentative and ſurety of ſinners, ſaw himſelf loaded with all the crimes of mankind; who knew and felt fully and diſtinctly their malice and enormity; who bore all the confuſion of them, who had a proportionable repentance and ſorrow for them; who acknowledged himſelf worthy of all ignominies and chaſtiſements; who offered to undergo them, who attracted them by his deſires, and who was always in the immediate diſpoſition of enduring them. Let us ſuppoſe in every ſinner the ſentiments which grace can inſpire him with after his ſin; let them be in a degree of force and of perfection as eminent as it is poſſible to conceive, his humility would doubtleſs be extreme. Nevertheleſs it is true, that the united confuſion of all ſinners put together, never could come up to that which Jeſus Chriſt experienced, when he ſaw himſelf overwhelmed with the weight of all our iniquities. The more holy was his ſoul, the more incapable it was of the leaſt

* Coloſſ. ii. 9.

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leaſt ſtain, the greater was his knowledge and his horror of ſin; and the more was he humbled at that dreadful and univerſal leproſy by which he was disfigured.—Third character of the humility of Jeſus Chriſt.

After this let us judge, as much as we can, of the lowly ſentiments which Jeſus Chriſt entertained of himſelf in that which he held of the creature with reſpect to what he owed to grace, and to what he merited from the title of victim for ſin. And yet his ſoul was the moſt perfect ſubſtance that ever came out of the hands of God; from the firſt inſtant of its creation, it was immediately and irrevocably united to the perſon of the Word: and this ſingular favour, the greateſt in the power of God to communicate to a created ſubſtance, included the plenitude of all gifts and graces. The ſame union of the Word with its fleſh raiſed it above the ſublimeſt intelligences, and endowed it with like an infinite purity and dignity. He was holy with the holineſs of God himſelf, and was abſolutely impeccable both in ſoul and body; and poſſeſſed in the moſt eminent degree, or rather above every degree and meaſure, all perfections and virtues.

And though there was ſo much reaſon in appearance for his not being humble, yet he was, not only outwardly but alſo inwardly the leaſt and laſt of men; that he conſidered himſelf as a worm,

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a worm, worthy to be trampled under foot and crushed; that he chose for his portion all kinds of humiliation; an obscure birth, a hidden, poor, and laborious life, an ignominious death; that from his cradle to the cross he chose to be despised, calumniated, persecuted, outraged in his doctrine, in his miracles, in his prophecies, in his titles of Messiah, of King, of Son of God, and condemned as a seducer, hypocrite, a blasphemer. No one has ever appeared, and no one will ever appear upon earth who has been so much humbled, who has so much wished and thought he so much deserved so to be as the Son of God made man. O ineffable Mystery! that such a Master had a right to say to men, what no one else had said to them before: *Learn of me, that I am humble of heart;* and that if I be humble, from my example you ought to be so also: since I have only been such, to teach you the necessity of being so!

Pardon, O Lord, the meanness of my ideas, and the weakness of my expressions, in what I have been saying of thy incomprehensible humility, for my own instruction, and for that of my readers. What can we comprehend of so exalted a lesson, but what thou vouchsafest to unveil? Alas! the limits of our mind cannot admit it; and the annihilations of the God-Man are not, and never will be perfectly known, but to God alone.

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And yet this leſſon is made for us, and there is none to which we ought to apply ourſelves more, there is none more ſuitable to us, and none ſo indiſpenſible. Wo unto us, ſhould we not profit by it; we were loſt through pride, and the profound abaſements of Jeſus Chriſt have ſaved us: but they will not avail us, unleſs we cheriſh and practiſe humility. Let us go back to the characters of the humility of Jeſus Chriſt, and let us apply them to ourſelves.

The firſt reaſon for being humble is, that we are nothing but creatures. We hold not from ourſelves either our exiſtence, or our preſervation, or our natural qualities which are very inferior to thoſe of Jeſus Chriſt. O if we had like him the lively idea, the penetrating ſentiment of our nothingneſs; of that nothingneſs that ſhews itſelf throughout our whole being, that pierces through every part, that wholly ſurrounds us, and out of which we are drawn by an all-powerful hand, in ſuch a manner as to remain always ſuſpended, and of ourſelves to be always tending to it with our whole weight. If we were to join to this idea that of him who exiſts of himſelf, who exiſts abſolutely, without limits, without meaſure, without duration, ſuch as was the idea of Jeſus Chriſt, how humble ſhould we be! But alas! we are too weak to ſupport the immenſe weight of thoſe two ideas. Let us, however, make uſe of the imperfect notions

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notions which we have of both the one and the other, that we may keep ourſelves before the divine Majeſty in the humility that is ſuitable to a creature. Let us acknowledge that we never can be duly reſpectful, ſubmiſſive, and lowly, in the preſence of this ſovereign Being; which ſentiment ought never to forſake us, ſince we carry with us our nothingneſs whereſoever we go, and ſince the ſame power which has drawn us out of it, prevents us from dropping into it again.

To keep us in humility, and do away the favourable opinion which we have of ourſelves, let us reflect on the imperfections we diſcover in ourſelves; how limited our underſtanding is, and how prone our heart is to evil: how unruly our paſſions; how imperious exterior objects are over our ſenſes, and through our ſenſes, over our ſoul. We do not preciſely know what ſin in this reſpect has added to our original condition. But we know that all that is good in us comes from God; and that our defects and imperfections proceed either from the eſſence of our nature, or from our own fault.

What folly then, and what an illuſion muſt it be to conceive the leaſt vanity from any natural advantages either of ſoul or body; and, as it almoſt always happens, from thoſe very advantages which are the leaſt valuable; to aſcribe them to ourſelves, as if they were our

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own; to lift ourſelves up, and to ſwell into ſelf-admiration, whilſt we deſpiſe others who have not, or whom we fancy have not, ſuch ſimilar endowments! What an injuſtice and ingratitude not to return thanks for them to God! and what a monſtrous diſorder to turn againſt him even his own benefits; to make uſe of our faculties and of our exiſtence in order to offend him; which faculties and exiſtence he only could give us to promote his own glory. That man, who is nothingneſs, ſhould think that of himſelf he is ſomething, that he ſhould glory as if it was his own, in what has been given him; that he ſhould employ his faculties to inſult and outrage the Author of his being; that he ſhould think and act as if he only exiſted by and for himſelf; as if he was accountable to no one for his thoughts and proceedings, are ſo many degrees of pride, the leaſt of which is hardly pardonable.

A ſecond reaſon for being humble: we do not depend leſs upon God in the order of grace than in the order of nature; and this order of grace is to us of much higher importance. Exiſtence, it is true, is the baſis of all God's gifts; but the end which he propoſed to himſelf by giving us our exiſtence, is a benefit which incomparably ſurpaſſes this firſt gift. Being in no need of us, and having created us merely becauſe it was his will, and in the manner

ner in which he chose that we should exist, he has destined us to possess him throughout an eternity, and to be happy with his own felicity. He himself assures us of it; and all revelation tends to this great design, which it both unfolds and performs. As this end is supernatural, the proper means that lead to it are also supernatural; and this is the pure effect of the divine bounty; on our part we contribute nothing towards it; and all that we can do is to praise and thank God, to devote to him our mind and heart, to depend in all things on his holy will, to employ those means of salvation with which he furnishes us, to make use of our free will but according to his intentions, and in short to submit ourselves to the interior action of his grace, which by its lights and attractions will lift us up to an end so sublime.

With what profound humility ought we not to be penetrated, when we think upon what we are, and on what God designs for us! I can do nothing towards my eternal happiness; of myself I cannot even form an idea of it, nor yet even know the path that can lead me to it; and did I even know it, I could not enter upon it, nor take one single step towards it of myself. In short I am a nullity, an absolute nullity, with respect to the affair of my salvation, in which I cannot be successful but by an entire and continual dependance on the action of

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God. It belongs to him to enlighten my mind and to excite my will, which he muſt turn and determine to, and fix it in that which is good; he muſt inſpire me with good thoughts, and cauſe me to execute them; the beginning, the progreſs, and the end of this great work appertain to him alone. On my part, I muſt believe that I am incapable of any thing; I muſt be inceſſantly diffident of myſelf; I muſt undertake nothing of my own accord; I muſt be in the hands of God like an inſtrument which he may diſpoſe of as he pleaſes, and to correſpond by my conſent with all the impreſſions which he may chuſe to give me; I muſt be pliable, docile, obedient, attentive, and faithful in never preventing him, but always in following him; I muſt aſcribe to him whatever good I do, and all that I wiſh to do; in a word, I muſt live and die in a full conviction and acknowledgment that I hold every thing from God in the ſupernatural order, and that I am even indebted to him for the good uſe I make of his gifts. What then remains to me, after that I have given to God that which appertains to him? Nothing. In what then can I glory? In nothing.

Thou ſpiritual pride, a thouſand times more criminal, as well as more dangerous than that which is natural, be thou cruſhed and annihilated. Ye proud righteous, who obſerve but the

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the exterior of the law, from whence you draw to yourſelves a favourable teſtimony, be confounded and humbled. You are ſtill devoid of the right notion of chriſtianity, ſince you are ignorant of the ſpirit of it. As long as in the leaſt you rely on yourſelves, as long as you lay any ſtreſs on your own reſolutions and efforts, as long as you appropriate to yourſelves, I do not ſay any good work, but even the very deſire, the thought, or the firſt idea of any good work, God rejects you, and owns you not for his children; theſe refer to him every ſupernatural gift, and glory only in their own lowlineſs, weakneſs, and their total incapacity of any thing that is good. Let your pretended holineſs be what it will, which in fact is but an outward regularity, the moment that pride tarniſhes and vitiates it, it is an abomination in the ſight of God; which inſtead of crowning, he will ſeverely puniſh.

Reflect ſeriouſly on this truth; and according to the command of the apoſtle, *work out your ſalvation with fear and trembling* *; knowing that in this enterpriſe, if left to yourſelves, you neceſſarily muſt fail, and render ineffectual every ſuccour from above. Whoſoever therefore you may be, who may have room to believe that this great work goes on and proſpers, be humble and grateful, and do not retard nor hinder

* Phil. xi. 12.

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hinder the ſucceſs of it, by aſcribing it to yourſelf, through a ſecret pride.

Third reaſon for being humble: we are ſinners, not by repreſentation, as Jeſus Chriſt was, but we are really ſo. What do we bring with us at our birth? Sin and an inclination to ſin. Since we have attained the uſe of reaſon, what have we done? We have ſinned; we have abuſed God's graces. 'Almoſt our whole life is a texture of ſins; we neither know the number nor the grievouſneſs of them; we are every way ſolicited to ſin, from which if we preſerve ourſelves, it is but by dint of vigilance and prayer; and ſhould we be remiſs in our union with God, we are on the brink of a fall. What motive of humiliation is not that inexplicable allurement which we feel within us towards evil, that curioſity we have of acquiring a knowledge of it, thoſe deep impreſſions which it makes on our memory, the facility we have in committing it, and the extreme difficulty in reſiſting it, notwithſtanding the aſſiſtance of grace! For if once we fall, we never can riſe again of ourſelves. Who is the man who does not experience within himſelf all that is here ſaid, if he has but allowed himſelf any ſort of reflection? and if he acknowledges it to be true, how can he be otherwiſe than humble? I have offended God, and at every inſtant I am capable of offending him; ſin is always at the door

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door of my heart, and I am violently impelled to give it admittance; a hundred times God has pardoned me my sins, and as often have I relapsed. I tire and exhaust his patience, of which I make a pretext to continue to offend him. I have sinned with joy, with effrontery, and audacity, with a kind of insult and contempt of God, with obstinacy and fury, defying, as it were, and provoking his vengeance. What cogent motives for the most profound humiliation, did we but reflect on God, on man, and on sin!

Neither are we to say, to be dispensed from being humble, that we have sinned but seldom, or that we have no grievous offence to reproach ourselves with. It may be so; there are some souls who have preserved their innocence; there are others who, after a few falls, have returned to God, without ever contracting any criminal habit. But to whom are they indebted? who has preserved them? who has brought them back? why are they less guilty than others? Is it because they were born with a happy temper? But this they hold from God. Is it because they have received a good education from virtuous parents and masters? It is God who procured them that advantage. Is it because they never were in any dangerous circumstances? It is God who preserved them from them? Is it because they renounced the world

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at an early period, and retired into ſolitude? It is God who called them to it. Is it becauſe temporal afflictions, unforeſeen diſappointments, overthrows of fortune, or ſome other ſuch reaſons have induced them to ſeek for a more ſolid happineſs in the practice of virtue? It is God who, through a ſpecial providence, has prepared thoſe events. I ſee nothing in all this, in which they can glory; on the contrary, I ſee motives for humble and thankful acknowledgments. The nature of every benefit is to render us more humble, eſpecially when, on our part, we have done nothing to deſerve it.

Beſides, let ſuch chriſtians who have lived with great purity of conſcience, recal thoſe dangerous occaſions to which they have been expoſed; one only of which was ſufficient to be their ruin; and who is the man who has been abſolutely ſcreened from them? Let them recal the many temptations which with difficulty they overcame, the many bad thoughts which aroſe in their mind, the many criminal deſires which took birth in their heart, and let them ſay, if they can, what would have become of them if God had not watched over them with a particular attention. Becauſe they owe more to God, he exacts of them a more profound humility, and greater returns of thanks.

O my Saviour, grant that thy leſſons and example may at laſt teach me to be humble. Thou

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Thou art the model of all virtues, but eſpecially of that; it has been, if I may ſo expreſs myſelf, the predominant virtue; thou haſt carried it in every reſpect to an incomprehenſible exceſs, if there could be an exceſs in humility. If thou the God-Man, thou the holy by excellence, thou the ſpecial miracle of grace, haſt been humble beyond all conception: what then ought I to be; I, a creature ſo imperfect, ſo great a ſinner, in whom no virtue, no good work perhaps could ſtand the ſcrutiny of thy juſtice. How comes it that I find it ſo difficult a taſk to humble myſelf? Nothing ſhould ſeem more natural to me. Ah! it is here where I diſcover the ſtrange diſorder and inverſion which pride, the ſource of all ſin, has occaſioned in me. The more reaſon I have to be humble, the more do I reſiſt my becoming ſo; and this is what thy light diſcovers to me to be that which ought to be the moſt humbling to me. And yet if I mean to be pleaſing in thy ſight, I have no other road to take than that of humility. Humility will cover my faults, and ſupply my want of virtues; it will be to me in lieu of merit, and obtain from thee an everlaſting crown. *Amen.*

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TWENTY-SIXTH LESSON.

ON HUMILITY, ONCE MORE.

JESUS CHRIST does not say: Learn of me that I am humble in my discourse, in my comportment, in my whole exterior conduct, though most undoubtedly he was so: but going straight to the essential, he says: *Learn of me that I am humble of heart*: that is to say; that what appears in my exterior, is but a faint expression of my inward dispositions; that I have lowly sentiments of myself, that as man I not only have no pretensions to any esteem of myself, but think myself worthy of contempt, and that whatsoever insult or injury may be offered to me, I think in my heart that I am dealt with as I deserve. This is in fact true humility; the seat of it is in the heart; we begin by despising ourselves from an intimate persuasion that by so doing we only do ourselves justice; after which we are willing that others should equally do us justice, and that they should seem to think in the same manner of us, as we think of ourselves.

Exterior humility is neither lasting nor sincere, but in as much as it flows from this source:

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source: otherwise it is but affectation, grimace, and hypocritical pride, which on the least occasion shews itself for what it is. We know that pride is detestable in itself, and that in fact it is detested when it shews itself without disguise; and that on the contrary, there is nothing more amiable and more productive of men's esteem, than humility. The proud, therefore, borrow the semblance, and put on the appearance of it; they assume the tone, the language, and manners of it; and thus attain to consideration and distinction, which they affect to reject; they make a merit of a virtue, which they would be sorry to possess; they gather the fruit of it, which is what they aim at, without paying attention to the thing itself. Besides, all such hypocrites are apt to unveil themselves on certain unforeseen occasions, and with a little attention and discernment, no one will be their dupe; in their feigned humility, there is a something so forced and unlikely, which presently unmasks and betrays them.

Humility of heart is simple, frank, and natural; the humble man practises it without thinking of it; he is humble, not only without seeking to appear so, but without thinking that he is so. For whosoever should think himself humble, on that very account he would not be humble. It is essential to this virtue to be hidden to the eyes of him who possesses it: it is ignorant of itself;

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itſelf; and it is but by means of this ignorance that it takes birth, and preſerves itſelf in a ſoul. To call one's ſelf humble, would be ſo great a folly, that I hardly can fancy that any one can ſay it; to think one's ſelf humble, would be the effect of the moſt refined and deliberate pride. Jeſus Chriſt alone, having to inſtruct mankind, to whom he was given as a model, could and was to have ſaid: *Learn of me that I am humble of heart:* the reaſon is, becauſe being compoſed of two natures, and becauſe humility could only belong to his nature as man, he was authoriſed to reveal to men the interior diſpoſitions of his ſacred humanity, which, as I have already mentioned not having any *ſelf* of his own, was not ſuſceptible of any pride, or any ſelf-complacency: and therefore it was not his humanity, but the Word that ſpoke thus through the organ of his humanity, and diſcovered the virtues belonging to it, as much as was neceſſary for our inſtruction and imitation.

It is the property of humility to preſerve God's rights, and ſecure them againſt the uſurpations of the creatures. To God is due the glory of all his works; and this ſo excluſively, that he declares that he never will ſhare it with any one. He exacts, that in every circumſtance his glory ſhould return unto him untouched; ſo that in glorifying his angels and ſaints, he only means to glorify himſelf. Humility acquits itſelf

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ſelf towards him faithfully and joyfully of this tribute of glory, and would reproach itſelf as of the moſt criminal theft, the ſmalleſt reſerve of it. God on his part beholding that his gifts and favours are ſafe in an humble ſoul, delights in enriching her with and heaping them upon her: becauſe ſhe neither retains nor appropriates to herſelf any part of them; and ſo far from glorying in them, ſhe becomes the more humble. From hence we may judge how pleaſing this virtue is to God, ſince it is from thence that he draws his exterior glory, a right which is incommunicable, and of which he is ſo jealous; and how much he abhors pride, that inſanely attempts to rob him of it.

If glory, of which human pride is ſo greedy, appertain only to God: what then is due to man? Nothing that he has a right to claim or refer to himſelf, either in the natural or the ſupernatural order; no praiſe, no applauſe, no eſteem no ſort of glory is any ways due to him, either from his good qualities of mind or heart, or his good works of charity or beneficence, or his virtues, or the extraordinary gifts and graces which he may have received from God. This is what humility makes a duty to acknowledge; and therefore takes no ſhare in any thing of the kind: with horror it rejects all ſentiment of vanity, of complacency, of the ſlighteſt appropriation that might ariſe in the ſoul; and as to the

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praiſes of men, without examining or dwelling on them, it refers them to God, and leaves nothing to the creature.

What is due to a ſinner, to an ungrateful ſoul, to one who has offended an infinite Majeſty? contempt, affronts, ignominies, and torments. Humility teaches the chriſtian to ſubmit to them, whether they be inflicted on him immediately by the hand of God, or that God ſhould exerciſe his juſtice through the miniſtry of his creatures: it teaches him to accept them, to cheriſh them, to wiſh for them, to live in them, as in his own element, to be glad to expiate by ſuch means his offences againſt God, and repair the injury he had done to his glory. Thus does humility maintain God in all his rights; or reſtores to him what pride had uſurped; and it maintains man in the diſintereſtednefs, the littleneſs, and the nullity that become him.

From hence we may eaſily conceive how this virtue obtains the remiſſion of every ſin, by diſarming God's juſtice, and by leaving nothing for him to puniſh. God, who is goodneſs itſelf, and whoſe mercies are above all his other works: God, who hates nothing of what he has made, who in a ſpecial manner loves our ſouls, who wiſhes to make them happy, who offers them all proper means, who reluctantly conſents to the loſs of them, whilſt he is in ſome manner forced to it by their malice and impenitence;

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impenitence; God, I say, can he do otherwise than have pity on a contrite and humbled heart? can he do otherwise than restore it to his favour, whilst he beholds it grieved and repentant for having robbed him of his glory, and disposed to undergo every thing, to yield due satisfaction? He has promised pardon to repentance, of which interior and exterior humiliation is the principal part; and this humiliation may be so profound, as not only to efface, but even entirely to expiate even the greatest crimes. What was it that justified the Publican of whom our Saviour speaks? Humility. *Standing afar off**, his guilty conscience not permitting him to approach the sanctuary. He would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven, dreading lest he should see his judge justly irritated against him. In sign of compunction, *he struck his breast*, and prayed *that God would be merciful to him a sinner*. Jesus Christ declares that this humble publican returned home justified; whilst the proud Pharisee, puffed up with his exterior good works, and preferring himself before the rest of his fellow-men, brought home from the temple his own condemnation.

Humility sets the price upon all other virtues, which have not, nor can have any value but as they are grounded upon it. If you be chaste without

* Luke xviii. 13.

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without being humble, your chaſtity will have no merit in the ſight of God. Pray, faſt, practiſe auſterities: God accepts neither your prayers, nor your faſtings, nor your mortifications, if by the worm of pride they are vitiated. Give alms, exerciſe all the works of mercy, if you ſeek your glory before men; or even if you inwardly applaud yourſelf, and think better of yourſelf for ſo doing, you have received your reward, you have nothing to expect from God, who only crowns humility, and the virtues which are enhanced by humility.

I ſay that God crowns humility, even itſelf alone; and that in his ſight it ſupplies the merit of the other virtues. I want no other proof for this than the example of the publican of the goſpel. Had he died the moment that he left the temple, he undoubtedly would have been ſaved. But in virtue of what? of his humility. What would God have crowned in him? his humility. He had no other merit to offer him; but this alone was ſufficient to open to him the gates of heaven.

Not only do the other virtues draw their value from humility; but it is alſo their guardian, and without it, it is almoſt impoſſible to preſerve them. Are you vain of your charity? you run a great hazard of loſing it. Are you proud of your exterior obſervance of the law; you will not long perſevere in it. Do you prefer

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fer yourſelf before others, on account of the innocence of your life? You will not be long free from ſome notable fall; and this fall, ſays St. Auſtin, is uſeful, and even neceſſary to open your eyes, and cure you of your pride. That which is true with reſpect to virtue, is ſtill more ſo in regard to God's gifts. Are you favoured with the gift of prayer? you will infallibly be deprived of it, if it ſerves to feed your pride. If revelations, extaſies, raptures, and ſuch like graces trench in the leaſt upon your humility, God will withdraw them; or, what is worſe, he will permit the devil to counterfeit them, and throw you into a dangerous illuſion. Have you acquired great merits in the ſight of God, by a long life ſpent in piety and virtue? ſhould the wind of pride begin to blow, in an inſtant it will dry up, it will blaſt all the riches of your harveſt, and leave you empty handed.

I ſhould hardly finiſh, were I to extend to all the advantages of humility. It is this virtue that diſpoſes the ſoul of the ſinner to receive the gift of charity, which when once it has entered his heart, humility becomes its inſeparable companion: ſo that theſe two virtues increaſe and diminiſh in the ſame proportion; and that the degree of the one, anſwers to the degree of the other. What a wonderful virtue muſt that be, that is either the bond or the certain pledge of our union with God, that tightens

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tightens this union, and without which it could not ſubſiſt long: and therefore all interior ſouls, that is to ſay, thoſe who are ſingularly united with God, are always the moſt humble. It is by this character that they are known; humility of mind, humility of heart, that appears in their whole exterior; but a ſimple humility that is free from affectation and ſhow, and on which they themſelves never chance to reflect. The more the knowledge which they have of God is elevated, the more profound is their ſentiment of their miſery; the more grace they receive, the more they account themſelves unworthy of them. All divine favours abaſh and annihilate them; they ſhun them, they repel them, ſaying to God, like St. Peter, Retire from me, for I am all ſin: and the more they ſay ſo from the ſincerity of their heart, the more does God intimately communicate himſelf to them: there intervenes a kind of combat between God and the ſoul, and it is hard to tell on which ſide lies the victory; becauſe in proportion as the ſoul humbles herſelf, God redoubles his careſſes, and reciprocally. How pleaſing to God is ſuch a combat; and how he delights in being overcome by the humility of his creature!

As to the charity which we owe to our neighbour, it is needleſs to ſay that the humble ſoul practices it in perfection. Pride alone hinders

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hinders us from living well with others; it renders us difficult, nice, and touchy, and haughtily jealous of what we fancy is our due, and very little inclined to imagine that we owe any thing to our neighbour. Humility, on the contrary, is meek, affable, and benevolent; it has no pretentions, it takes offence at nothing, it bears with the faults of others, and places all its attention in giving pain to none.

Human wisdom, which was pretty well acquainted with the other moral virtues, was no ways acquainted with humility. I have no where met with any vestige of it, unless in Plato, who mentions it once; but who only means by it a certain natural modesty, very inferior to christian humility. Could the philosophers be acquainted with it without revelation? They were ignorant that man was drawn out of nothing; they only considered sin with a reference to human society, of which it violated the order, and hardly with a reference to God, whom it offends; they had but an imperfect idea of the maladies of the soul, not tracing up to the cause, nor following them in their baneful effects; they thought still less of grace, which is their only remedy; and without which man cannot attain to his final end, of which they were also ignorant. How then could they be humble whilst deprived of such lights? The lights that distinguished them from the vulgar,

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and the false virtues of which they made a parade, only served to nourish their pride; because they ascribed their lights to their own meditations, and their virtues to their own efforts. St. Jerome has very properly defined the philosopher: *An animal, greedy of glory;* an esteem of himself, and a contempt of others, constitute his character; humility is his abhorrence.

In despite of the lights and the precepts of the gospel, which tend to perfect the reason and the heart of man, the world is nearly in the same sentiments with the heathens, with respect to this virtue. It is this which shocks and disgusts it the most. It cannot endure to be spoken to about, nor to have the practice of it proposed to it. Pride is its principal idol. It is through pride, and not to be ranked with the vulgar, that it disdains the exercises of religion; it is through pride that it rejects the belief of the mysteries, and above all, that it abhors the ignominies and the infamy of the cross. The incredulity that is not the effect of pride, is susceptible of a cure; but the incredulity of which pride is the principle, is almost inaccessible to every remedy.

The aversion of worldlings from humility, leads them to disfigure it, and to form the most false notions concerning it. They think it a mean virtue, though it is the noblest of virtues, that which raises man the most above himself, and

and inſpires him with the moſt generous ſentiments. What is it, in fact, that degrades man? is it truth or falſehood? To be humble, is to think of God and of one's ſelf, according to the exact truth. Is it juſtice or injuſtice? To be humble, is to give to God that which appertains to God, and to retain nothing of it to one's ſelf. Now falſehood and theft, two ſuch mean vices, are they to be reckoned noble, when they attack God?

The world ſets humility down as a cowardly and puſillanimous virtue; whereas on the contrary, it is ſingularly courageous, capable of the higheſt enterpriſes, animated and ſupported by the hope of ſucceſs, becauſe it only forms them for the glory of God, and relies only upon God. What philoſopher ever conceived the deſign of the converſion of the univerſe, and of the deſtruction of idolatry? Among the many that Athens produced, did any one of them undertake to undeceive that city relative to their falſe gods? That which proud philoſophy has not even imagined to be poſſible, twelve Jews more contemptible in their own eyes, than in the eyes of the world, have undertaken, and have ſucceeded, and their ſucceſs only rendered them more humble.

The world holds humility as worthy of contempt: and I maintain that, conſulting reaſon alone,

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alone, it deſerves the greateſt praiſes. Yes, whoſoever liſtens to reaſon, and according to ſound reaſon forms an equitable and diſintereſted judgment, will be forced to admire the ſentiments, the language, and the conduct of the man truly humble. It is much rather pride that is contemptible and odious, becauſe it is nothing but meanneſs, cowardlineſs, and is productive of the moſt hateful vices: the world judges it to be ſo; it therefore condemns itſelf, and falls into contradiction, while it affects for the contrary virtue an hatred and a contempt, which in fact it has not. The truth of the matter is, that worldlings eſteem and love humility in others, but they have not ſufficient courage and greatneſs of ſoul to practiſe it themſelves. Let a man through an humility that is no ways equivocal ſhun and refuſe honours and high ſtations, in their heart they admire him; they judge him to be ſo much the more worthy, becauſe it is a received maxim, that the ſureſt mark of real merit, is to be diffident of one's ſelf, and to be unwilling to make a figure. In that very moment, therefore, they pronounce againſt their own pride, vanity, and ambition; and let them ſay what they will, they ſecretly deſpiſe in themſelves, what they loudly proclaim to be deſpicable in others. Humility has always been applauded; and pride, at all times, has been univerſally condemned.

O my

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O my God, what truth, what juſtice, what real grandeur do I diſcover in humility! and withal, what bleſſings, what ſupernatural advantages are the fruits of it! I feel within me an inconceiveable eſteem for, and a moſt ardent deſire to poſſeſs this virtue. How great is my guilt for not having known it ſooner; for having diſdained and calumniated it! O humility, the delight of the God-Man, the attraction of all the ſaints, when ſhall I love thee as thou deſerveſt to be loved! when ſhall I place all my glory and all my happineſs in the poſſeſſion of thee! O my Saviour, it is one of thy moſt precious gifts: I aſk it of thee, do not refuſe it me; I ſhall not think myſelf thy diſciple, but from the moment I begin to practiſe this virtue. Teach me to cheriſh at thine example, whatever may inwardly and outwardly humble me; and in all my thoughts, words, and actions, to have, like thee, only two objects, the glory of God, and my own abjection. *Amen.*

TWENTY-

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TWENTY-SEVENTH LESSON.

THE REPOSE OF THE SOUL IS IN HUMILITY.

AFTER having ſaid: *Learn of me that I am humble of heart*, Jeſus Chriſt adds: *and you ſhall find reſt unto your ſouls.* He knew of all virtues, that which is the moſt repugnant to our nature corrupted by ſin, and the moſt difficult to practiſe, is humility. He therefore immediately propoſes its reward, in order to animate our courage. But what reward? The greateſt which is in the power of God himſelf to beſtow, the repoſe of the ſoul. An eternal repoſe in the life to come. Though this be the ſalary of all other virtues, it is ſpecially that of humility, without which all other virtues would be devoid of merit. And moreover, a perfect and conſtant repoſe, even in the preſent life. I ſhall confine myſelf to the proof of this ſecond point: as no one doubts that the repoſe in heaven is the price of humility. Beſides, on account of our little faith, that which concerns our actual happineſs affects us more than what regards our happineſs to come: though there is no compariſon to be made. However, here upon earth the one does not exclude

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exclude the other: on the contrary, our real preſent felicity is a pledge of our future bliſs.

We know from certain experience, that all bodies are never properly at reſt, but in as much as they are in their place: out of that, they are in a ſtate of violence, and never ceaſe moving, or, by their weight, never ceaſe tending to move, until they occupy the place that is proper for them. Then all motions and all efforts ceaſe. It is the ſame with regard to ſpirits; they are in motion, and are agitated by their paſſions, as long as they are out of the place that is proper for them. Now what is the proper place for a ſoul that is drawn out of nothing, and has but a borrowed exiſtence? for a ſoul that is dependant in every thing on grace, in order to attain to her final deſtiny? for a ſoul that has ſinned, and is always liable to ſin? It is evidently that place which humility allots for her. There then ſhe will find an aſſured repoſe; and out of that ſhe has no reſt to hope for. The loweſt place in the earth is the centre of bodies; and the loweſt moral place is the centre of created ſpirits; and out of their centre there is nothing but agitation for them both. And this is the chief cauſe why there are ſo few happy men upon earth: becauſe very few keep to the place aſſigned them by humility; and on the contrary, almoſt all

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mankind uſe their utmoſt endeavours to withdraw from it as much as is poſſible.

To convince ourſelves of this important truth, which is one of the baſes of morality: let us ſee what pride on the one hand, and what humility on the other, produce in the heart of man; and we ſhall readily diſcover, that as much as he is diſturbed by the one, ſo much is he compoſed by the other.

Pride and ſelf-love are the two leading principles of the agitations of the human heart; and becauſe the objects by which the heart is allured by them both, are incapable of ſatisfying it; as long as it is a prey to theſe two vices, it muſt neceſſarily be always in emotion. Self-love comes only in the ſecond place; it does not ſhew itſelf, nor does it act, but in conſequence of the inordinate eſteem of ourſelves, of the exceſſive complacency in our own excellence, of the deſire we have of what may elevate us in our own eyes, and in the eyes of others; and of the fear of what may lower us in our own idea, and in that of men. Hence pride is the profound root of the thoughts, ſentiments, and actions that deprive us of our reſt. By the contrary reaſon, the humility that frees us from the agitations of pride, maintains us in a perfect calm.

The proud man thinking only of himſelf, referring every thing to himſelf, ſeeks not his repoſe

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repoſe elſewhere, but in himſelf; and never meets with it; becauſe no creature can repoſe in himſelf. It is the excluſive right of God, who borrowing nothing from without, finds a perfect peace in the fruition of the plenitude of his being: whereas the created being, indigent by his nature, is deſtitute of that which can ſatisfy him, and muſt have recourſe for his reſt to a ſuperior nature. The proud man, therefore, muſt always feel a want, and being never full, he is a prey to his deſires, to a hunger, and to a deſpair of ever being ſatiated. But the humble man, forgetting himſelf and laying himſelf aſide, grounds his repoſe on a ſolid foundation, becauſe he ſeeks it in God, where he is ſure to meet with it; nor does he ever loſe it, becauſe by keeping himſelf united with God, he views not himſelf, and falls not back on himſelf. Imagine God to be an immoveable centre. The proud man, who retires from this centre, is in a commotion, the rapidity of which is in proportion to the diſtance he is at. The humble man, who approaches it as much as he can, partakes of the central repoſe, according to his approximation.

Pride, in fact, is of itſelf the moſt turbulent of all vices; and humility, the moſt tranquil of virtues. The proud man being never content with his preſent ſtate, is totally taken up with projects of elevation; ſhould the firſt

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fail him, he immediately forms a ſecond, then a third, and ſo on to infinity. Not being able to remain in the condition in which God has placed him, he uſes violent efforts to aſcend higher; ſhould he meet with a fall, his efforts are not leſs in trying to riſe again. He is to maintain himſelf in the poſt that he occupies againſt thoſe who try to pull him down; he has to ſupplant thoſe who are above him, and whoſe place he ambitions; and as he is not the only one who has ſimilar pretenſions, he has ſtill to ſet aſide a crowd of rivals, who are neither leſs ardent, nor leſs active, nor leſs induſtrious than himſelf. In ſo critical a ſituation, between the hope of ſucceeding and the fear of miſcarrying, where there are ſo many ſprings to be put in motion, ſo many thruſts to be made and to be parried, what labour of mind! what torment of heart! wholly taken up with his object, he has not a ſingle moment for the poſſeſſion of himſelf. He is habitually diſtracted, penſive, and ſad; there is nothing that amuſes him; he loſes his ſleep; the pleaſures of ſociety for him have no charms; of all men, he is the moſt to be pitied, let the appearances be what they will, and the moſt inſupportable to himſelf, as well as to others.

The humble man preſents the oppoſite picture. Satisfied with his condition, he enjoys the advantages of it without envying a better fortune.

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fortune. In the path where he walks, he lays no ſnares for others, and, in general, no one thinks of laying any for him. Should he meet with misfortunes, he patiently ſubmits, and thinks himſelf mildly dealt with. His mind and heart are free; he poſſeſſes himſelf, and on the occaſion he is ready to ſerve others; he enjoys the innocent pleaſures of ſociety, where an engaging and peaceful joy, and a meek ſerenity are his conſtant companions.

Pride is of all the vices, the moſt touchy, the moſt irritable, and the moſt vindictive. The ſmalleſt trifle, a word, a geſture, a ſhadow even, a ſurmiſe ſtings and wounds the proud man. The diſpoſition of his ſoul may juſtly be compared to one labouring under a quick and inflamed bodily ſore, whom you cannot touch, even in the ſlighteſt manner, without cauſing in him the acuteſt pain. His imagination keeps him conſtantly on the alarm, leſt he ſhould not be ſufficiently noticed; he interprets every thing in an unfavourable light; he is the firſt to hatch his own torment, and takes umbrage at thoſe who perhaps thought the leaſt of giving him diſpleaſure. When once offended, whether right or wrong, he never forgives, even when he has had his revenge. Figure to yourſelf the tumult, the conflict of the thoughts and ſentiments that ariſe and boil in a heart thus diſpoſed.

Holy

Holy writ has traced to us in Aman, the character of the proud man, and the picture of the anguiſhes by which he is tormented. Rich, powerful, honoured with the confidence of his monarch, adored by the people who bent their knees before him, he was, even from his own account, the happieſt of mortals; but becauſe one ſingle Jew ſhewed him not the marks of honour, which he received from every one elſe, his felicity is embittered, he is highly indignant, and totally caſt down; he fancies himſelf degraded in his dignity, his credit, and his fortune. Notwithſtanding all the glory, the honours, the riches I poſſeſs, does he ſay to his friends: *I think I have nothing, as long as I ſee Mardochai the Jew ſitting before the king's gate**. I cannot digeſt the contempt he ſhews for my perſon, the very ſight of him ſtabs me to the heart; periſh he muſt, and with him all his nation, without which I would ſooner periſh myſelf. If for ſo ſlight a cauſe his happineſs vaniſhes from before him, and ſo ſorely torments his ſoul, we may eaſily judge what the inward ſtate muſt be of ſo many proud minds, whoſe proſperity is leſs, and more thwarted than that of Aman, and who are expoſed to more provoking affronts.

Humility, which nothing irritates, which renders a man indifferent either to honour or contempt, which ſtifles in him all ſentiment of revenge,

* Eſther, v. 13.

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revenge, muſt of courſe ſecure to him both his reſt and his happineſs. He never is ſuſpicious; nor does he look to read in the eyes and the countenance of thoſe whom he meets, what opinion they form of him. A want of attention, an unguarded proceeding, a ſlighting expreſſion in no ways ruffle him. Not but that he very well perceives when and when not he is properly dealt with; for the being humble, does not remove the delicacy of ſentiment: but whilſt he modeſtly returns what deference may be ſhewn him, he knows how to raiſe himſelf above what might ſhock the ſelf-love of another. Even an injury and a formal contempt move him not from the tranquil ſeat he is in; and he not only poſſeſſes himſelf, but he forgives, he forgets, and meets with thoſe who have offended him with as good a grace, as if they had treated him in the moſt honourable manner. It is thus that he takes his revenge, and that more efficaciouſly than he who is proud: for, barring downright impudence, he rarely is twice deſpiſed.

The proud man is not always ſucceſsful in his projects. As he is blind, he flatters himſelf againſt all reaſon, he often finds himſelf abaſed, while he expected elevation; the diſtinctions to which he aſpired, are refuſed him; he is no longer conſidered or thought of; he is left to mix with the crowd; and others

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are preferred to him, whose merit he fancies much inferior to his own. Into what a dismal despair do such disappointments throw him! and yet there is nothing more common in the career of honours, of wit, and of talents, and in every other career where vanity takes the lead.

The humble man, who does not push himself forward, who deems of himself much below what he is really worth, has no such difficulties to encounter; should his merits or talents bring him into reputation, he sets no value on the estimation of men, and only views himself as he is before God. Should he fail of success in the circumstances in which he appears in public, he is not afflicted, because his wish for success is no other than a wish that God's will may be done; and therefore which ever way the event may turn out, it is his wish that it should be so, because it is the will of God.

God resists the proud, says the Scripture*. He is pleased to confound them, either through justice, to avenge his injured glory; or through mercy, to bring them home to themselves. Their fellow-men, on their part, through a principle of malignity and envy, are well pleased to see them humbled; it is one of their secret wishes; and readily seize every opportunity of abasing

* Jac. xviii. 6.

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abaſing them; the reaſon of this is, becauſe pride is the moſt odious of vices, and the leaſt pardonable, as it hurts natural equality. Whoſoever deſpiſes others, is deſpiſed in his turn; pride is attacked on that ſide on which it values itſelf the moſt; it is diveſted not only of the merit which it falſely aſſumes, but even of that which perchance it may have: it is purſued like a common enemy, and people fancy that they are enriched by its loſſes, and elevated by its falls.

The humble man, on the contrary, is honoured both by God and men. The more he makes himſelf little, the more is God pleaſed to aggrandize him: and if, by way of trial, he keeps him for a time under humiliation, he afterwards indemnifies and glorifies him, thereby to glorify himſelf. Scripture, church hiſtory, and the lives of the ſaints teem with ſuch examples. There is a great number, to whom humility has procured, even during life, more honours than even the moſt ambitious ever could have hoped for. Joſeph, David, Mardochai are moſt ſtriking proofs. Men alſo are naturally inclined to raiſe humble merit, and to allow it more good qualities, than perhaps it may poſſeſs. We overlook the defects of the humble, we excuſe and perhaps juſtify them; we wiſh to appear equitable and even indul-

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gent towards him, because he himself pays due regard to, and respects the rights and pretensions of others.

The proud, who run in the same career, censure, tear, and cross one another. They unmercifully torment each other. Like so many wild beasts, they quarrel for the same prey, and envy each other's share. The humble live in peace together; they have no disputes with the proud, they do not walk in the same road.

Pride is sorrowful and sad, as well as all the other passions to which it gives birth, jealousy, envy, shame, spite, chagrin, fury, and despair; some of which are a slow poison that consumes, the others an ardent fire that devours. Whereas humility is joyous, and only inspires meek and pleasing sentiments. The humble soul, willingly dwells with itself; no cloud shades it, no storm disturbs it; it is inaccessible to all passions that corrode and devour.

Pride goes in search of grand theatres, on which it may appear conspicuous; but it is not there where rest is to be found, the asylum of which is in a hidden life, where humility finds its delight. The scene of the world is tempestuous; the more one shines in it, in whatsoever point of view it may be, the more is he agitated. To acquire, or to support a reputation

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tion is a great torment. Happy is the man who lives in obſcurity, and of whoſe name, as well as exiſtence, the world is ignorant, or who through humility preſerves himſelf from the danger of high ſituations and a brilliant renown, to which he may have been raiſed without having ambitioned them.

The ſupreme reaſon then, and the truth ſpoke through the mouth of Jeſus Chriſt, when he ſaid: *Learn of me that I am humble of heart, and you will find reſt to your ſouls* *. The proud man has no kind of repoſe, neither on the part of God, nor on the part of his neighbour, nor on his own part. As a man, he has none, and much leſs as a chriſtian. In his life-time, he enjoys none, and will be a ſtranger to it in eternity. This invaluable advantage is reſerved for the humble man, who under every aſpect poſſeſſes it here below, and will poſſeſs it in heaven, with the aſſurance of poſſeſſing it for ever.

O Repoſe of the ſoul, the aſſemblage of every bleſſing, it is according to order that thou ſhouldeſt be the reward of a virtue that ſuppoſes and unites every other virtue. My great, my only intereſt, the intereſt of my happineſs engages me to be humble; and though I had no other than this motive alone, is it not ſufficiently cogent to determine me ſo to be? Grant

* Matth. xi. 29.

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Grant therefore, O Lord, that I may love humility as much as I love myſelf, as much as I love my happineſs; and that I may deteſt pride as my enemy, as the bane of my repoſe, as the firſt cauſe of the eternal loſs of the devils and reprobates.

TWENTY-

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TWENTY-EIGHTH LESSON.

ON THE MEANS TO ACQUIRE HUMILITY.

FROM what has hitherto been read of humility, I ſhould think that the chriſtian ſcholar muſt have conceived a high eſteem of this virtue, and an ardent deſire of acquiring it. Should I be aſked for ſome method in order to that, I refer to thoſe authors who have purpoſely written on this ſubject, and particularly to Rodriguez, one of thoſe who have treated on it the beſt. But after all, I ſee no method that is comparable to that which Jeſus Chriſt himſelf includes in theſe two words: *Learn of me.* You have my leſſons in the goſpel; ſtudy them, and reduce them to practice. You have my examples; my whole life is a mirrour of humility: form yourſelves upon me. You have my inward grace that will ſolicit and aſſiſt you to profit by my leſſons and examples. What more is wanting in order to become humble? Let us therefore adhere to theſe three heads. It is a plain method, and does not embarraſs the mind; it is a complete method: for without entering into a minute and tireſome detail of the precepts and counſels, it embraces them all

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all, and ſets them before us as the occaſion offers: it is alſo perfect in every reſpect, whether it be conſidered as to the doctrine which it teaches, or as to the model which it preſents, or to the ſuccours it procures.

As Jeſus Chriſt is not barely the Maſter of humility, but alſo it is he who beſtows it, let us begin before every thing elſe to aſk him for the love of this virtue; but this important prayer muſt come from the bottom of our heart; we muſt frequently repeat it, and inceſſantly perſevere in it; and ſhow, by our continued ſolicitations, our eagerneſs to obtain ſo precious a gift. No prayer can be more acceptable to Jeſus Chriſt: of this we cannot doubt: and he infallibly will hear us, if we be ſincere in our wiſhes.

For how many are there who pray for humility, who would be ſorry that God ſhould grant it them? This is one of thoſe points where illuſion moſt eaſily creeps in. On reading a good book, in a meditation or, in a communion, we may have been moved, and may have felt an attraction towards this virtue, and even may have prayed for it to God. But we did not reflect that to love humility, to deſire, and to aſk for it, is the ſelf ſame thing as to love, to deſire, and to aſk for humiliations, which are the concomitance, or rather the food of it; and without which, it is only a fine, but a vain idea. Now if

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if the bare thought of that which humbles us, ſtrikes us with horror; if with all our might we repel it, if on every occaſion, pride and ſelf-love aſſume the aſcendant, and inſtead of oppoſing their ſuggeſtions, we yield to them, being abſolutely unwilling to ſuffer any thing diſpleaſing to them; in vain do we flatter ourſelves that we love humility; in fact we do not wiſh it, and our prayer is illuſory. Let us then examine ourſelves on this head, before we put up the petition to God; and without giving ſcope to our imagination, without making ſuppoſitions too powerful for our weakneſs, let us ſee whether we be determined and ready to bear with the lighteſt and the moſt ordinary humiliations: otherwiſe what would ſuch a prayer avail us, but to deceive ourſelves, whilſt in fact we had in abhorrence, what we appeared to aſk for.

However there are others, although not very numerous, who pray to God for humility in the ſincerity of their heart, who offer themſelves for every humbling croſs that it may pleaſe God to ſend them. This offer, on their part, is a real conſecration, and from that moment they no longer ſhould conſider themſelves as belonging to themſelves, but as appertaining to Jeſus Chriſt, under whoſe banner they are enrolled. After this offering, reiterated as often as grace ſhall inſpire, they muſt betake to the method above propoſed.

Let

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Let them then take the gospel in hand; let them read it, supplicating the Lord to give them to understand it. In every page they will find lessons of humility. Let them ruminate and ponder them; let them apply them to their own conduct, and draw from them practical inferences conformable to their present situation; and on the occasion, let them make it a point of duty to practise those lessons, by opposing the repugnances of nature, and by never ceasing to use violence to themselves, until they attain to the object they have in view. The first essays will be painful, it is what they must expect: but then they may be assured, that after two or three victories matters will be easier.

There is not one lesson of our Lord that does not tend to abase human pride; if we fix upon any one of them, it will lead us to all the others: for they are all linked together, they proceed from the same spirit, and arrive at the same term. Let us invoke him, that he would vouchsafe to grant us to see that which is the most necessary for us; and let us endeavour to reap benefit from it. The gospel will never be of any use to us, unless we seriously proceed to practice, and to a practice that is analogous to our character, to our condition, to our state of life, and to our present dispositions.

At the same time that you are studying the lessons of our Saviour, give as much, and even more,

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more attention to his examples, which are not leſs inſtructive, and to thoſe which ſtrike you the moſt. His conduct is the ſureſt and the moſt perfect explication of his doctrine; which certainly is not favourable to the indulgences and the modifications which nature would wiſh to give it. He has gone infinitely beyond what he exacts of us, to the end that we may be without excuſe, if we refuſe to endure that which is nothing in compariſon to what he has done and ſuffered for us.

Obſerve, if in any one circumſtance he has ſpoken or acted for himſelf, and to withdraw himſelf from the moſt notorious outrages; if in any thing he has ſought his own glory; if he has been jealous of the eſteem of men; if through fear of bringing on himſelf ill treatments, he has either flattered them or concealed from them the truth. Being ſo ſtrictly united to the Divinity, and charged with the higheſt miniſtry that ever was, ſhould it not ſeem to us that his ignominies reflected on God himſelf; and that for the intereſt of his Father who had ſent him, he ought to have made himſelf reſpected, and appear in all the apparel of the majeſty of a God-Man. It is thus that human ſenſe judges; thus alſo the Jews his perſecutors judged, and the proud philoſophers of the firſt ages of the church, and the not leſs proud unbelievers of our days. But he has judged otherwiſe; and though he

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he knew the consequences both with respect to himself and to his religion, he has chosen, and if I may venture to say so, he has affected whatever could inspire contempt for his person and for his character of Messiah. Faith, and a very supernatural faith was necessary to believe in him, and raise one's self above his apparent lowliness. *We have seen him*, says a prophet *, *and there was no sightliness that we should be desirous of him.* The Man concealed the God; and never was the Divinity better concealed. He discovers himself for what he is, but with a marvellous economy, either to his disciples, to the people, or to his enemies. He shews light enough to enlighten the former, and to confound the latter; but he never infringes on humility; and no sooner has he darted a ray, than he enters again into his former obscurity. If he manifests only once on a remote mountain the glory of his holy humanity to three of his disciples; he expressly enjoins them silence, till after his resurrection. He might have wrought conspicuous miracles; his enemies asked for them; but he always refused them, his humility opposed it; he only wrought miracles of beneficence, without apparel or ostentation, to reward the faith of those who applied to him, to whom he generally recommended silence.

As

* Isa. liii. 2.

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As much as God is jealous of his glory, ſo much has the God-Man neglected and trampled under foot his own; becauſe he thus enhanced that of God. What was his exterior! What did his perſon, his condition, his manners, and his diſcourſes offer to the ſight, that did not breathe forth the profoundeſt humility? Whoſoever conſidered, examined, and ſtudied him with the prejudices of human wiſdom could not but deſpiſe him: this, indeed, was his intention, that no glory ſhould be given to him, but that in him God his Father might be glorified.

I ſpeak here only of his exterior humility, which even I but ſlightly touch: higher up I ſpoke of his inward ſentiments, which ſurpaſſed all that outwardly appeared of him, and of which leſs has been revealed to us by himſelf than by the prophets and the apoſtles, David particularly, Iſaiah, and St. Paul.

Chriſtian ſouls, who wiſh to be humble, let your mind and heart be always fixed on Jeſus Chriſt. Follow him from his manger to his croſs, and at every example ſay: ſuch was, and ſuch choſe to be my Maſter, my Model, my Saviour, and my Judge. Such was he in my name, and holding my place, to teach me what I myſelf muſt be. I ſhall always fall infinitely ſhort of ſo perfect a pattern; but I am to endeavour to approach it; and there is no

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chriſtianity where there is no imitation of Chriſt.

But you muſt not imagine that without the light of his grace you can comprehend any thing of the picture which the goſpel ſets before you. Jeſus Chriſt upon earth was only known through faith; and he is not known otherwiſe at preſent: and a very particular grace will be wanted, to enable us to penetrate, in any tolerable way, into the ſecret of his humility. To a certain degree, this light will be given you; but it will increaſe in you only in proportion to the good uſe you make of it. If in practice you neglect it, it will infallibly quit you. If you follow it, it will enlighten you more and more, and introduce you by degrees into the abyſs of the humiliations of the God-Man.

In order to come to that, you muſt entirely abandon yourſelf to the guidance of grace; and this is the third head of the method included in the ſaying of Jeſus Chriſt: *Learn of me.* He inſtructs much more inwardly than outwardly, and joins ſuccour to inſtruction. Nature only inſpires pride; and grace, which in every thing is oppoſite to nature, only inſpires humility. Pay attention to that which grace prompts you to, it is always to humble you; by this mark it makes itſelf known, as nature is known by the mark that is contrary.

Now

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Now grace proceeds more or leſs in the following manner. It firſt of all penetrates the chriſtian with the ſentiment of his nothingneſs, of his total incapableneſs of any ſupernatural good, of the neceſſity he is under of being always dependant on God, and of inceſſantly having recourſe to him with an abſolute diffidence of himſelf. It teaches him to retain a remembrance of his ſins, that he may keep himſelf under a ſalutary confuſion, and repreſs the firſt motions of pride; it warns him not to be too ready in flattering himſelf with having obtained pardon of his ſins, and prompts him to expiate them by penance, of which humiliations that are the portion of ſinners, is the principal part.

It teaches him carefully to conceal his good deeds and his virtues, not only from others, but alſo from himſelf; never ſtopping to think on them, and never allowing himſelf any vain complacency; it likewiſe teaches him to be ſilent on the graces he receives from God, and to avoid all indiſcreet communications, which under the cloak of the glory of God and the edification of our neighbour, might be fuel of ſelf-love, eſpecially with beginners.

It alſo teaches him not to be troubled at the faults into which he may fall, but quietly to humble himſelf without loſing his peace, and even to be well pleaſed with it, from the abjection

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jection that results from it; especially when such faults have been committed before others, and might be a lessening of the good opinion they had of him. This practice, that is so much recommended by St. Francis of Sales, is more difficult than is generally imagined. In this case, there is nothing more common than to feel vexed through a kind of spiritual pride, which suggests to us a thousand human reflections, always clothed with an appearance of piety or charity! It is, we are apt to say, for for the interest of God or of our neighbour, that we are pained. It is no such thing: it is for our own interest. The humble man repairs his fault when he is apprehensive that he has offended or scandalized his neighbour: but after that, he is no ways in pain about what people may think of him. I here confine myself to the first elements of humility which are taught by grace.

One of the things which it puts the deepest into the heart is, that God always is the principal agent, in all that tends to our humiliation; that it is he who to this end employs his creatures, and arms them for the destruction of pride, the radical vice of man. Convinced of this truth, we more readily submit and are more in guard against the complaints and the rebellions of nature. God, in fact, makes use of our fellow-men, in order to humble us; of their

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their defects, of their malignity, of their indiſcretion, and of their preventions. The haughtineſs of ſome, forces us to yield: the obſtinacy of others, to give way; the pretenſions of theſe oblige us to relent in our's; the humour of thoſe compels us to ſupport and put up with many mortifications. Malicious criticiſms and unjuſt cenſures try our ſenſibility, and render us leſs nice and delicate on the ſcore of reputation; backbitings and calumnies, make room for many ſacrifices, eſpecially ſhould we attempt our own juſtification, and fail in our endeavours. The indiſcretion of thoſe who report to us what others have ſaid of us, by revealing our hidden faults, or ſpeaking contemptuouſly of us, muſt put our humility to the trial, as well as the prejudices which others take up againſt us, and often are the ſource of endleſs miſunderſtandings.

God alſo to humble us makes uſe of ourſelves, of the follies of our imagination, of the illuſions of our mind, of the weakneſſes of our heart and of its bad, mean, and intereſted inclinations; on all which we never can reflect, without bluſhing for ſhame, and judging ourſelves deſerving of hatred and contempt.

He makes uſe of the devil, whom he permits to annoy us with humbling temptations and horrid ſuggeſtions, ſometimes more excruciating to the mind, than any bodily torture.

Laſtly,

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Laſtly, God himſelf humbles us, by giving us ſuch penetrating ideas of his grandeur, and of our own miſery; of his goodneſs, and of our own malice; of his holineſs, and of our own corruption, that we know not where to fly to deliver ourſelves from them. The confuſion of Adam, after his diſobedience, aſhamed before God of his revolt and nakedneſs, is but a faint image of that which a ſoul experiences in ſuch a ſituation.

If in theſe different humiliations, from whatſoever quarter they may come, we remain conſtantly under the hand of God, faithful to his grace, and docile to the advice and deciſions of our ſpiritual Guide, we ſhall attain to a degree of humility ſo much the more eminent, that we ſhall not even have a ſuſpicion that we are humble, nor ſhall we paſs for ſuch in the opinion of others.

It is only with regard to ſome ſpecially choſen ſouls that God employs the trials that immediately come from himſelf or from the devil; and he gives them the neceſſary ſtrength to bear them. But thoſe trials that come to us from men, are common to all chriſtians; and it ſhould be our concern to make a good uſe of them, for the acquiſition of ſo precious a treaſure. Let us examine ourſelves ſeverely upon all that relates to humility, whether interior or exterior,

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exterior, and let us neglect nothing in the practice of a virtue that approaches us the nearest to Jesus Christ.

I feel in me, O Lord, how much my nature resists humility, how much it dreads and repels it, by which I the more clearly see how much I stand in need of it. Increase, therefore, thy grace, that I may redouble my prayer, and overcome all my reluctances. Yes, I am resolved to learn of thee to be humble, to learn it from thy lessons and from thy examples, and to put myself under thy direction. How dreadful will this resolution be to my pride! But perish for ever that pride, that has caused in thee so much ignominy and pain. The source of every disorder that is in me, is my cherishing this vice, and my abhorring humility. Re-establish, O Lord, and assist me to re-establish proper order in my nature. Grant me all the courage, all the greatness of soul, all the constancy that are necessary for so arduous an enterprise. I expect this from thy bounty; and I hope that thou wilt not permit that a resolution so pleasing in thy sight, should be devoid of effect. *Amen.*

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TWENTY-NINTH LESSON.

ON PATIENCE.

THIS leſſon falls in with that which treats on the neceſſity of carrying our croſs; but there is no inconveniency in returning a ſecond time to a ſubject of ſuch importance. Jeſus Chriſt, after having ſet before his diſciples the frightful picture of what they would have to ſuffer from the potentates of the earth in the eſtabliſhment of his religion, to ſupport them againſt ſuch a dreadful perſpective, he adds: *In your patience you ſhall poſſeſs your ſouls* *; that is to ſay, that he promiſes to veſt them with a ſupernatural power that ſhould raiſe them above their evils, and maintain their ſouls in peace, even in the midſt of torments.

The ſequel of his diſcourſe ſhews, that whilſt he was ſpeaking to the apoſtles, he alſo had in view the primitive chriſtians, that were *betrayed by their parents, and brethren, and kinſmen, and friends*; and to give to this promiſe its full extent, we muſt alſo ſay, that it regards all true chriſtians, who not only in perſecutions on account of their faith, but in afflictions of every kind,

* Luke, xxi. 19.

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kind, ſhould have recourſe to God, and ſhould rely ſolely upon him.

Jeſus Chriſt has kept his word; and from age to age we behold it accompliſhed in all events whether public or private. The apoſtles in their patience poſſeſſed their ſouls in their immenſe labours, in all kinds of evils to which they were expoſed, and in their martyrdom with which they were crowned. We may judge of the others by St. Paul, whoſe acts and epiſtles clearly teſtify that his patience reached up to heroiſm, ſo as to be well pleaſed in his ſufferings, ſo as to glory in them, ſo as to feel in them a ſuperabundance of joy.

The hiſtory of the chriſtians of the premitive church, their apologies, the relations of their martyrdom, equally ſhew that they poſſeſſed their ſouls in their patience amidſt the ſevereſt and the moſt cruel perſecutions. Their courage, their peace, their ſerenity were the admiration of the heathens, though they were accuſtomed to behold gladiators that were prodigal of their blood, and exerciſed to die unconcernedly. The invincible patience of chriſtians of every age, ſex, and condition appeared to them to be of a very ſuperior order, and was the chief cauſe of their converſion. In all ſucceeding ages, the ſaints whom the church has formed, have edified her by their patience under all kinds of croſſes; and this virtue has always

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been one of the characteriſtics of all true chriſtians. Let us not do them the injury of comparing to them on this head ſome philoſophers, of whom hiſtory relates ſome inſtances of patience. Notwithſtanding his incredulity, Rouſſeau, running a parallel between the death of Socrates and that of Jeſus Chriſt, is forced to own, that if the firſt died like a wiſe man, the ſecond died like a God. If he had had occaſion to ſpeak of the patience of martyrs, he could not but have acknowledged that it was ſomething divine. And indeed one muſt be very unjuſt not to allow the ſuperiority of the chriſtians in this reſpect, over the philoſophers; or muſt be much vitiated in his principles, not to prefer a religious and ſupernatural virtue, to a virtue that was meerly human, and the reſult of pride. For after all, the philoſophers attributed their patience to themſelves, and to the force of their reaſon; whereas the chriſtians did give, and continue daily to give the glory of it to God.

As the evils of life are inevitable, and as patience alone can mitigate them, very little reflection will induce us to agree that it is a neceſſary virtue, though there are few even amongſt chriſtians who endeavour to acquire it. In order to acquire it, we ought to begin from afar, and prepare ourſelves for great evils, by bearing peaceably thoſe that are ordinary. And this is not practiſed. In trivial matters,

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we suffer ourselves to be led away by impatiences; and when heavy pains overtake us, we go to an excess either of dejection or fury, of which we ourselves are the first to be ashamed, when we have recovered our reason.

We acquire patience only by degrees; and it is chiefly with regard to this virtue that the maxim of our Saviour is verified: *He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater* *: an ordinary grace is sufficient to possess one's self in small troubles either of body or mind; but an extraordinary grace is wanting to enable us to possess ourselves in hardships considerable in themselves, or in their duration. If you neglect the ordinary grace, the extraordinary grace which God is wont to grant, in consequence of your fidelity will be wanting to you in time of need, and will leave you to all your weakness. It is therefore necessary that we should begin early to exercise ourselves in patience on the occasions that are daily, in order to deserve that God should support us on those that are more rare and difficult. This is what we are taught by christian wisdom; but few there are who avail themselves of such lessons, of which sooner or later they surely will repent.

Patience is not a solitary virtue, but includes the practice of a great many others; the virtue of

* Luke xvi. 10.

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meekneſs and of charity in bearing with our neighbour; the virtue of humility, in hard and mortifying circumſtances; the virtue of detachment from earthly things, in the loſs of our property and of thoſe that are dear to us; the virtue of ſelf-denial, in events that oppoſe our will; the virtue of fortitude, in all bodily pains; and in general, the virtue of conformity to God's will in all painful ſituations and afflictions.

Worldly philoſophy has exhauſted itſelf in precepts on this matter. Epicurus himſelf has made it the baſis of his morality: being forced to own that the phyſical evils in this life are more numerous than the bleſſings, and therefore that the eſſential point was to fortify man againſt pain. I ſhall not ſtop to diſcuſs what may be true or falſe in what the ſages of antiquity have written upon this ſubject. I only ſhall obſerve, that purely human reflections are very inadequate to our ſupport in adverſity; becauſe every preſent evil acts vividly on the imagination, dejects the heart, and diſturbs our reaſon. Beſides, ſuch a philoſophy ſuggeſts no motives that are capable to determine us to ſuffer with fortitude; and there are ſome kinds of evils, ſuch as thoſe that humble us, againſt which it has nothing to offer. It is not ſo with the chriſtian morality; this ſets before us motives the moſt powerful in the expiation of ſins, in the eternal reward that is offered, and in the examples

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examples of Jesus Christ. Moreover it accompanies these motives with a supernatural succour, which God grants to all who invoke him in their sufferings; a succour that is efficacious, that strengthens them, that comforts them, and fills them with a spiritual joy.

Patience is a source of glory to God: He is the only Being who is worthy that we should suffer and sacrifice ourselves for him. He possesses his grandeur when he beholds his creature, in acquiescence to his will, receiving with humble submission the chastisements he inflicts, or the pains by which he puts his love to the trial. It is a source of edification to our neighbour: for virtue edifies at all times; and there is no proof less equivocal of virtue, than patience, either in adversity, or sickness, or in injuries and ill-treatments. It is this virtue which in the opinion of the Heathens, has reflected the greatest lustre on our holy religion. *How great is the God of the christians*, were they wont to say, witnessing their invincible constancy in their torments. It is also a source of abundant merit to ourselves. Great occasions of suffering are not very frequent, but small ones offer themselves daily, and almost at every instant. Now, the least contrariety borne with for God, will not go unrewarded; and if this reward bears a proportion to the violence we use with ourselves, we may easily judge how great the reward

ward will be of some certain crosses which are so difficult to carry. That which we the most ardently wish for upon earth, is to be able to be satisfied that we really love God: and no virtue gives us a surer pledge of this, than patience. We love God when we willingly suffer for his sake; and reciprocally we willingly suffer for his sake, when we love him.

Finally, one of the most precious advantages of patience is that we possess our soul. To possess our soul in the midst of evils, is to belong to ourselves, it is to belong to God; it is to enjoy liberty of mind, peace of heart, the only happiness in life. Ask a patient man, if he be content with his situation: he will answer, he is: if he had a wish for a deliverance from or even for a diminution of his sufferings, to the prejudice of the will of God; without hesitating, he would answer in the negative. He therefore is happy, as much as one can be, in such a situation. Impatience, which robs us of the possession of our soul, deprives us, of course, of the first of all blessings; besides, instead of mitigating or shortening our evils, it adds to them, and mostly prolongs them, and renders them not only useless for the expiation of our sins, but causes us to commit more; and far from meriting any degree of glory, it exposes us to punishments in the life to come.

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In order to remedy the vice of impatience, which every way is so pernicious, and sometimes brings on melancholy and despair, we should apply ourselves to the discovery of its causes. In some it proceeds from the vivacity of an impetuous character: in others, from a peevish and fretful disposition: sometimes it has its source in a haughtiness of mind, or a stiffness and stubbornness of will. In impatience there is almost always a great fund of pride, which disposes the soul to rebel against God; and it is this pride, when carried to a certain pitch, that produces violent vexations, imprecations, and blasphemies.

The cause once known, we are to apply a remedy. There is no harm in employing such remedies as reason suggests; it is laudable to make use of whatever can procure us patience: but there would be a degree of folly, and a kind of impiety to reject the much more efficacious means which religion sets before us. We never shall be truly patient, unless we are solidly christians. We may obtain honour from men, by a stoical patience; we may affect outwardly to be calm, whilst inwardly we are in agitation; but whilst we have no witness, we throw off the mask; or else we may shew courage in bearing some bodily pain, but dejected at every trouble of the mind. We must be patient in every thing, in mind and in heart, in secret and in public.

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public. Now, grace alone can make us ſuch; which grace, nothing but a chriſtian life will procure us.

To whom, O my God, is not patience neceſſary; and to whom is it ſo much ſo, as perhaps it is to me? As I cannot foreſee what may happen to me, prudence requires that I ſhould make a proviſion of it; it will be too late to think of it, when evils have overtaken me. Give me therefore the will and the ſtrength to practiſe this ſublime virtue on daily occaſions; grant that I may be accuſtomed to poſſeſs my ſoul, to preſerve an even mind and a tranquil heart; that I may receive as coming from thy hand whatever is painful to me; that I may conſider it as the means to expiate my ſins, to acquire merit, and above all to approve my love for thee; and thus to promote thy glory, and ſecure my own happineſs. *Amen.*

FINIS.

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